

P12

VERSTAPPEN TAKES POLE POSITION FOR CANADIAN GRAND PRIX



P13

FIRST CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM ETHISX SET FOR LAUNCH THIS WEEK



P20

BACK TO TABLETOP GAMES



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Prince Saud bin Mohammed bin Turki bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies to King Salman, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and to grant his family patience and fortitude to bear the loss. — ONA

112 WEEKLY FLIGHTS TO KHAREEF SALALAH

Oman Air will ramp up flight frequencies on its Muscat-Salalah-Muscat sector to a total of 112 weekly flights from June 23 till September 11. The airline offers wide-body service between Muscat and Salalah, including the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus A330 in addition to the Boeing 737, with eight flights per day in each direction, providing flexible travel and connecting flight options. The first flight from Muscat departs at 02:05, and the last flight departs at 20:20. **DETAILS ON P13**



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LANKA TROOPS OPEN FIRE TO CONTAIN FUEL RIOTS **P6**



COOLING THE HOTTEST CITIES IN THE WORLD **P9**

Before HM, officials take oath of office



MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, several officials took the oath of office at Al Barakah Palace on Sunday. The oath of office was taken by the following: HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki bin Mahmoud al Said, Governor of Dhofar; Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council; Eng Salim bin Nasser bin Said al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals; Dr Mohammed bin Said bin Khalfan al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Dr Hilal bin Ali bin Hilal al Sabti, Minister of Health and Shaikh Ghusun bin Hilal bin Khalifa al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

His Majesty issues Royal Decree

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No (48/2022) on conducting promotions and placements at the Internal Security Service. Article (1) promotes Brigadier Mohammed bin Rabé bin Jamaan al Shujaibi to the rank of Major General and appoints him as Assistant to the Head of the Internal Security Service for Operations.

Article (2) promotes Brigadier Saif bin Salman bin Salim al Shukhaili to the rank of Major General and appoints him as Assistant to the Head of the Internal Security Service for Administrative Support. Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

Royal orders on Majlis representation

MUSCAT: As per the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, issued a statement regarding the representation of the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and the Wilayat of Sinaw at the Majlis Ash'shura.

As per the statement, the Majlis Ash'shura representatives of the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah and the Wilayat of Sinaw in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah will be elected during the Council's 10th term, scheduled to be held in 2023. — ONA

HM CONFERS CIVIL ORDER



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred Oman Civil Order, 2nd Class, on Juma bin Rashid bin Said al Balushi, Former Head of the Royal Protocols. The conferment took place at Al Barakah Palace on Sunday. The conferment comes as recognition from His Majesty for the efforts exerted by Al Balushi in carrying out his duties during his tenure at the Royal Protocols in the Diwan of Royal Court. — ONA

Nato chief warns Ukraine war could last 'years'

KYIV: Nato's chief warned that the war in Ukraine could last "for years" as President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed on Sunday his forces would not give up the south of the country to Russia after he visited the frontline there. Ukraine said it had also repulsed fresh attacks by Russian forces on the eastern front, rocked by weeks of fierce battles as Moscow tries to seize the industrial Donbas region. While Ukraine remained defiant, Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged Western countries must be ready to offer long-term military, political and economic support to Kyiv. "We must be prepared for this

to last for years", Stoltenberg told German daily newspaper 'Bild'. "We must not weaken in our support of Ukraine, even if the costs are high — not only in terms of military support but also because of rising energy and food prices." British Prime Minister Boris Johnson issued a similar warning, urging sustained support for Kyiv. "Time is now the vital factor", Johnson wrote in an article for the *Sunday Times* after making his second visit to Kyiv, calling for the West to ensure Ukraine has the "strategic endurance to survive and eventually prevail". **SEE ALSO P7**

Plan to distribute 23,000 land plots to beneficiaries in 2022: Minister

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Sunday affirmed that it is pressing ahead with completing the distribution of land plots to cover 23,000 applications in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman as per the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. This was stated Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, when the Majlis Ash'shura hosted him during its 15th regular session of the third annual sitting of the



Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili

9th term to discuss the ministry's statement. He said that efforts are being intensified under the schemes that ensure basic services to citizens as

much as possible, and added that four out of every five plots went to women constituting 78 per cent of the beneficiaries. "The biggest problem of plot distribution is in Muscat, where there are more than 50,000 applications annually", he said, and added that Omani families deserve buildable residential plots. The minister covered five main areas including general policies for housing and urban planning, a study on the reality of land reconstruction, ministry's objectives during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), among others. **DETAILS ON P4**



NEW MINISTERS, OFFICIALS TAKE OATH



Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council



Eng Salim bin Nasser bin Said al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals



Dr Mohammed bin Said bin Khalfan al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs



Dr Hilal bin Ali bin Hilal al Sabti, Minister of Health



Shaikh Ghusun bin Hilal bin Khalifa al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution

UK continues as biggest foreign investor in Oman

SAMUEL KUTTY
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With a total investment of RO 8.495 billion, the United Kingdom continues to remain the biggest foreign investor in the Sultanate of Oman.

The United States of America stood at the second position with a RO 2.666 billion investment, followed by the United Arab Emirates with RO 1.230 billion at the end of the first quarter of 2022.

The total volume of foreign direct investments (FDI) in the Sultanate of Oman at the end of March 2022, according

to figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, increased by 19 per cent to reach RO 17.940 billion, compared to RO 15.70 billion in the corresponding period in 2021.

The oil and gas extraction sector accounted for the largest proportion of foreign direct investments with a value of RO 11.807 billion in the first quarter of 2022, with a growth of 21.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

The manufacturing sector, which attracted RO 1.600 billion, however, recorded a decrease of about 5.6 per cent compared to the same period in 2021,

The US stood at the second position with a RO 2.666 billion investment, followed by the United Arab Emirates with RO 1.230 billion at the end of the first quarter of 2022

reveals the data from the state-owned agency.

The Sultanate of Oman is in the process of developing further advantages for foreign investors, including a programme

of tax and fee incentives, permissions to invest in several new industries in the economy, expanded land use, increased access to capital, and labour and employment incentives for qualifying companies.

These reforms seek to improve the Sultanate of Oman's investment climate and are in line with the Sultanate of Oman's Vision 2040 development plan.

In a report at the weekend, the International Monetary Fund predicted Oman's fiscal reforms and higher oil prices to boost economic growth and generate a budget surplus in the medium term.

"The economy is projected to grow by about 4.5 per cent in 2022 while the government is expected to have a budget surplus of 5.5 per cent this year", the Washington-based agency said.

The foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman increased by 9.5 per cent to reach RO7.251 billion at the end of March 2022, compared to RO 6.621 billion during the same period in 2021.

The effective exchange rate index of the Omani rial witnessed an increase of 4.2 per cent to record 108.3 points, compared to 103.9 points in the same period in 2021.



Sayyid Shihab receives US commander



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs received Lt Gen Michael E Kurilla, Commander of the United States Central Command, in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday. They exchanged views and discussed several matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), some senior officers at the office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, the Charge d'Affairs at the US Embassy in Muscat and the embassy's Military Attaché.

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed Al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, also met Lt Gen Michael E Kurilla. Lt Gen Michael expressed his appreciation for Oman's role in enhancing areas of cooperation between the two countries.



They also reviewed the march of historic relations between Oman and the US in all spheres and means of enhancing them to serve the joint interests of the two countries. They also touched on several regional and international issues and discussed matters of common interest.

Lt Gen Michael E Kurilla met Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of

the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). They exchanged views and discussed several military matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Mantheri, Assistant SAF Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, some senior officers at the SAF Command, the Charge d'Affairs at the US Embassy in Muscat and the embassy's Military Attaché. — ONA

Governorates to fast track growth, welfare

MUSCAT: The System of the Governorates, promulgated by Royal Decree 36/2022, specified the work of the governorates in coordination with the authorities concerned with implementing the state's general policy with a view to guaranteeing the rule of law and protecting the interests of the state.

The System of the Governorates aims at investing in the resources of the governorates' and preserving, realising sustainable development, tapping the potentials of the governorates, creating job opportunities for citizens, establish and manage municipal facilities, protecting public properties, complementing the public facilities and services in the governorates, taking part in urban planning, protecting the environment, and executing developmental projects in each governorates.

As per the details of the System of the Governorates, regulating the municipal activities is done in accordance to unified regulations issued by the minister of interior. The minister meets with the governors at least twice a year or as the need arises, to discuss the common affairs of the governorates.

The governor is responsible for preparing projects related to the development plans for the governorates in coordination with the competent authorities and following up on their implementation. In addition, the governor is responsible for preparing the governorates' draft annual budget and its final account and submitting them to the Ministry of Finance, issuing decisions imposing municipal fees within the framework of the state's general policy after the approval of the Ministry of Finance. The minister also coordinates with the competent authorities with regard to determining the uses of land in the governorates without prejudice to the purview of the



municipal councils.

The governor is the representative of the government in the governorate. The governor receives complaints related to the governorate and takes appropriate decisions in this regard, coordinating with the heads of government units regarding the performance of their branches and offices in the governorate. The governor directly oversees the walis, follow up on their daily work, evaluate their performance, and submit periodic reports on them to the minister and also submit an annual report on the outcome of the governorate's work as well as issues that need to be presented to the Council of Ministers, to the Minister of Interior, who, in turn refer them to the Council of Ministers.

The System of the Governorates states that each governorate has within its organisational structure, a municipality with the level of a directorate-general except for the governorates of Muscat and

Dhofar where the municipality has a higher status and they directly fall under the governor.

The municipality within the governorate is concerned with practicing all municipal activities stipulated by the System. The municipality has a branch in each wilayat that undertakes the exercise of activities within the wilayat under the direct supervision of the municipality.

The System of the Governorates stipulates that each governorate should have an independent budget. The financial resources of the governorate are provided from allocations to the state's general budget in return for the services it provides to others, gifts, subsidies, and grants accepted by the governor after the approval of the Council of Ministers. The other sources of finance include investment returns and a percentage of municipal fees which are determined by a decision of the Council of Ministers.

■ RAO CHIEF RECEIVES SANDHURST COMMANDANT



MUSCAT: Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), received Maj Gen Duncan Capps, Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS), in Muscat on Sunday. They discussed several military matters in academic and training fields and means of enhancing them. They also exchanged views on a number of matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Salim bin Saif al Hosni, Senior Staff Officer, Brigadier Abdullah bin Mohammed al Badi, Director of Training and Inspection and some senior RAO officers. Maj Gen Capps also visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). He was greeted upon his arrival at the centre by the Acting Head of the MSC. The guest was briefed on the centre's tactical roles and tasks in managing and leading search, rescue and environment preservation operations. He also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties.

Haj quota increased by 2,000



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Sunday said the Haj quota for the Sultanate of Oman for this pilgrimage season has been increased by 2,000.

"The quota of pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman for this Haj season (1443 AH) has been increased by 2,000, with a total number of 8,338 pilgrims," the ministry said in a statement.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs recently concluded the electronic sorting for people who e-registered for this year's Haj Season 1443 AH.

The process has been arranged with pilgrims' registration firms through a shared digital connection system.

The eligible applications' quota includes 14 applicants for cancer patients, 5,381 for people who met the requirements of performing Haj, 61 for people who want to perform Haj to fulfil wills, 572 volunteers and 128 applicants who want to perform Haj on behalf of other incapable people.

Earlier, Oman's quota for this season of Haj was 6,156, with 5,956 seats for Omanis and 200 for residents.



Oman Trading Establishment LLC



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority

RECALL CAMPAIGN
For HYUNDAI i20 (PB)



Date of Campaign : 20 / 6 / 2022
Campaign Type : Recall
Recall Segment : Electrical
Product Description : Hyundai i20 (PB)

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2008- 2012	Hyundai	i20 (PB)	MALBC51SP8M000061 to MALBB51C5CM380777	25

Description:
Some vehicles might experience the power outlet poor operation when using the TMK (tire maintenance kit) continuously.

Procedure:
Install the extension cable to the TMK according to the procedure given by Hyundai Motors

For More information:
Customers of affected vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment for further details/booking Appointment etc from Date – 20/06/2022

Contact Details:
Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.30 PM with effect from Date 20/6/2022



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers to the following tenders:

No	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 2022/067	Supply of Standard Uniform for all SOHAR Port and Freezone	26.250

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Sunday, 19/06/2022 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 30/06/2022.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRUXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:

- A request for the electronic tender documents
- Scanned bank transfer
- The firm's commercial registration documents
- All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@sohamportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents by email.

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons.
- All SMEs are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents.
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:
sipc.procurement@sohamportandfreezone.com

It all starts here
+968 2685 2700 | sohamportandfreezone.com



3 NEW SITES WITH OVER 4,000 HOUSING UNITS

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The government is on course to complete the distribution of plots for 23,000 applications, Dr Khalfan al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning told Majlis Ash'shura members while disclosing the ministry's plans on Sunday. The minister shed light on several topics such as public policies for housing and urban planning, a study of the reality of land reconstruction and partnership with the private sector. "The drafts of Real Estate Development Law, the Unified Addressing System Law and the Law of Expropriation for the Public Benefit have been completed. Work is under way to prepare a draft to amend the real estate registry system, as well as the Housing Law and the Urban Planning Law," he said, indicating these will be referred to the Council of Oman.

The ministry is also planning to expand the National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods 'Sorouh' by offering three new sites with more than 4,000 housing units. It is also planning to offer 10 more sites across governorates this year.

Dr Al Shueili said four out of every five plots went to women constituting 78 per cent of beneficiaries, he noted. "The biggest problem is in Muscat, where there are more than 50,000 applications annually," he said and added that Omani families deserved buildable residential plots.

The minister's statement included five main areas: General policies for

housing and urban planning; a study on land reconstruction in the Sultanate of Oman; ministry's objectives during the Tenth five-year plan period 2021-2025, the ministry's role within the projects and programmes of vital sectors within the framework of the Tenth five-year development plan 2021-2025; and partnership projects with the private sector for the cooperative housing system.

The Minister of Housing touched upon Royal Decree No 42/2021 regarding the grant of government lands and the different opinions raised by some segments of society about its objectives. He stated that the ministry dealt with these views by studying them with complete objectivity and sharing them with relevant authorities to find out the most important observations.

On digital measures, Dr Al Shueili said that the ministry had made significant strides in achieving digital readiness by launching several digital platforms including integrated services platform, Amlak; real estate development platform, Tatweer; geographical information gateway platform, Gio Oman; Internal correspondence System, Salasa and 'Choose Your Land' service platform to grant residential lands. The minister said: "The Ministry adopts several measures to provide integrated, fast, efficient and high-quality services. Among these measures are strengthening the decentralisation in conjunction with the implementation of the comprehensive digital transformation plan, expanding the powers granted to general managers in all fields, reviewing service fees and engineering procedures, strengthening partnership with the private



Target to distribute
23,000 plots in 2022;
8,000 already
distributed. Urban
planning meant to
balance elements of
development

Drafts of laws on Real
Estate Development,
Unified Addressing
System and
Expropriation for the
Public Benefit
completed

1,259 applications for
housing assistance
worth RO 30 million
given in 2021

sector and developing some unified service outlets."

"Tenders have been issued to construct new buildings for the General Directorates of Housing and Urban Planning in Al Dhahirah and South Al Sharqiyah governorates", he said.

He added that the ministry, in support of the real estate sector and within the framework of its plan to provide more stimulus packages, reduced the percentage of fees for land sales transactions from 5 per cent to 3 per cent. As a result, the number of legal transactions reached more than 205,000 from 2021 until April of this year, with a trading value exceeding RO 3.2 billion.

The ministry has also provided usufruct land, the most important of which are for food security projects that achieve development goals, have qualitative value and constitute added-value. "The number of usufruct contracts exceeded 9,000. The ministry is working to offer 430 usufruct plots with fees set for each purpose and 200 usufruct deals by bidding, distributed over all the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. This contributes to achieving the goals related to the economic sectors and is part of the government's integration steps aimed at sustainable growth in accordance with the frameworks set by the urban strategy", he explained.

In addition, one of the ministry's objectives is to distribute residential lands according to an approved methodology that takes into account the gradation in the specified number of distributions to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the "Choose Your Land" platform after

linking with the relevant government agencies. "In this context, the distribution of nearly 8,000 residential plots has been completed by mid-June", Dr Al Shueili said.

The ministry also studied and decided on about 35,000 requests to prove and register properties from 2020 to April 2022, while more than 27,000 requests are targeted in the next phase.

"Among the achievements is giving away 1,259 housing assistance worth RO 30 million during 2021. The recent royal orders to strengthen the housing assistance programme with RO 70 million during the current five-year plan will cover nearly 2,800 applications and exempt 1,836 cases from the housing loans, with a total amount of more than RO 33 million.

In addition, there is a move to expand the National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods 'Sorouh' by offering three new sites for more than 4,000 housing units. There is also an initiative to bid on ten sites distributed over the governorates during this year", the minister confirmed.

He elaborated that in view of the suspension of the housing assistance programme since 2015 and in view of dealing with the housing loan programme, the ministry is seeking with the concerned authorities to agree to transfer the programme to the Oman Housing Bank to facilitate the process of deciding on the applications. The ministry confirmed that the applications retain the right of seniority and registration controls and that the government will continue to support this programme.



Caution urged to avoid summer fire mishaps

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Summer calls for care to avoid fire mishaps. Under high temperatures, things become dry and any trigger cause fire. Its spread is so fast mostly that not possible to douse humanly without mechanical intervention.

Chances of vehicle fire, particularly AC fires, are high during peak of the summer. Keeping this in mind the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has called for precaution against fire incidents.

“Many fire incidents happen during the summer and vulnerability become high during the peak of summer,” a top official from the Authority has told the Observer.

According to him, farm and vehicle fires besides fires from malfunctioning of air conditioners as well as industrial fires keep them on their toes during the summer season.

“Vehicle fires are mainly due to unmaintained parts and overheated cables burst car ACs. Industrial fires are also mostly due to negligence as the people do not heed to HSE guidelines. Machines get overheated to external as well as mechanical functioning,” the



official added.

Prevention pays off. So better to be extra careful to maintain normal functioning during the summer season than putting in bigger trouble later.

AVERT VEHICLE FIRE

- Park vehicle under a shade as much as possible
- Keep the windows of the vehicle ajar when parked as it can help emit the hot air

- Do not keep inflammable materials inside the car
- Carry out routine checks of the parts and fix the loose cables
- Do periodic checks and change filter on time
- Be aware of the use of fire extinguisher kept near the driver's seat
- Avoid smoking as even a small spark can lead to fire since vehicle interiors are built

of plastic and other highly inflammable material

One should not forget to switch off the engine immediately in case of smell of rubber or plastic burning from inside or outside of the car.

To avoid industrial fires, production houses should adhere to HSE guidelines and all the staff members should have orientation about safety norms.

The top authority of any company or factory should use explosion-proof electrical equipment and other less-dangerous materials and keep the workplace clean.

There should not be accumulation of flammable materials and if at all useful for the industry, it should not be left unattended or loose on the premises.

Industries should avoid tampering with any fire system, such as smoke detectors, if the handler is not qualified to operate it.

The usage of flammable and combustible materials need to be limited and in case the company is using them, they should be stored and handled properly.

“Training programmes on safety and security should be an ongoing process and due priority should be given to man, machine and system,” the CDAA official said.

Six students get ready for Math Olympiad in Norway



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Innovation and the Scientific Olympiad, is training 6 students to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the 63rd International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) 2022 in Norway from July 6 to 16.

On the importance of the Omani students' participation, Ma'en al Hinai, Senior Scientific Olympiad specialist in the Ministry, said: “The Ministry sought to discover students who are good at mathematics, select the elite among them and refine their skills, through training on scientific subject according to four areas in mathematics: algebra, geometry, number theory, and combinations.

The selection of participating students went through three stages. The first stage was shortlisting students who are good at mathematics from various governorates. In the second stage, the Ministry implemented an online training programme for

The training courses play a major role in developing students' skills and building up their self-confidence, in addition to improving their academic level

more than 30 students.

The third stage is the intensive training camp supported by a group of mathematics experts in which six students are trained for 10 hours per day for a week. They also get training in solving global exercises and problems inspired by previous international Olympiads to familiarise them with the patterns and methods of solving different questions.”

Dr Mahmoud bin Mohammed al Hashami, a mathematics teacher from Mazin bin Ghadouba School in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, and a mathematics trainer for the students participating in this training camp, said: “The students participating in this camp are

among the best students of the Sultanate of Oman in the field of mathematics, whom we look forward to, as they are trained in the four mathematics topics, and various international problems and tests in mathematics. I see in them enthusiasm and diligence and hope they will achieve advanced positions in this international Olympiad.”

The students participating in this training camp express their eagerness to participate in the International Olympiad in Norway and expressed their appreciation of the efforts made by the ministry to provide training for them, and to impart knowledge to them that touches their passion for mathematics and contributed to enhancing their psychological and mental readiness to represent the Sultanate of Oman in the World Olympiad. The training courses play a major role in developing students' skills and building up their self-confidence, in addition to improving their academic level and expanding their knowledge base in mathematics in its various branches.

Several arrested for blackmailing, drugs

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

The police command of North Al Batinah Governorate arrested two Asian nationals including a woman on charges of fraud and extortion.

The woman duped the victim into hosting her in his house and during her stay, the man showed up and threatened the victim alleging that he is a relative of the woman and

demanding a cash from the victim.

The Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, arrested three Asian nationals on charges of possessing drugs for trafficking.

The anti-drug police seized 10 kg of crystal meth, 7 kg of morphine and 19 kg of hashish.

The Coast Guard Police in Musandam Governorate seized

a smuggling boat and arrested three Asians who were inboard.

The police seized more than 23,000 bottles and cans of alcoholic beverages.

Legal procedures pertaining to the cases are underway.

The police command of North Al Batinah Governorate in collaboration with the Special Task Police arrested three expats including two African women for being involved in immoral acts.

Patient Safety Friendly Primary Care launched

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Directorate General of Quality Assurance Centre (DGQAC) in collaboration with the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) of the World Health Organization (WHO), launched the Patient Safety Friendly Primary Care (PSFPC) initiative in Muscat on Sunday.

The aim is to expand the implementation of this initiative for the year 2022 in the Directorate General of Royal Hospital and Samayil Hospital.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmiah, MoH Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs, in the presence of Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative to Oman along with a number of experts from the WHO.

A number of directors-general of health services in various Governorates, directors of hospitals and heads of quality departments at the hospitals attended the event.

Dr Jean Jabbour stressed



that the Sultanate of Oman is committed to assuming full responsibility for improving the health system. He added that involving other hospitals in the patient safety initiative and applying the electronic reporting on adverse events is a significant achievement added to the Sultanate's credits.

Dr Qamra al Sariri, DGQAC Director-General, touched upon the patient safety initiative,

which was launched in 2016 and involved 26 health institutions in the public and private sectors.

The Ministry launched particular standards for the primary healthcare institutions in five governorates across the Sultanate of Oman; Muscat, Dhofar, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah and al Dhahirah, as well as the Royal Hospital and Samayil Hospital.



Europe swelters in record breaking June heatwave

PARIS: Spain, France and other western European nations sweltered over the weekend under a blistering June heatwave, with some wildfires still blazing even as the weather began to ease.

The soaring temperatures were in line with scientists’ predictions that such phenomena will now strike earlier in the year thanks to global warming.

Emergency services battled several wildfires on Sunday in northern Spain. The most alarming blaze in the north-western Sierra de Culebra mountain range has destroyed over 25,000 hectares, the regional government said.

Firefighters said cooler temperatures overnight had helped them make progress in their battle against the flames.

Residents of some 20 villages who were evacuated from their homes were allowed to return home on Sunday morning, local officials said.

Temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius have been recorded in parts of Spain throughout the week, but they had dipped by Sunday in most of the country.

The mercury was only expected to hit 29C in Madrid on Sunday and 25C in the province of Zamora where the Sierra de Culebra mountain range is located. There have also been fires



A zookeeper fills a trough with water for giraffes as he monitors animals during heatwave conditions sweeping across France, in the Vincennes Zoo, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP

in Germany, where temperatures reached 36C. In southern France, a blaze triggered by the firing of an artillery shell in military training burnt around 200 hectares of vegetation, authorities in the Var region said.

“There is no threat to anyone except 2,500 sheep who are being evacuated and taken to safety,” the local fire brigade chief said.

The popular French southwestern seaside resort of Biarritz saw its highest all-time temperature on Saturday afternoon of 42.9C, state forecaster Meteo France said as

Experts warned the high temperatures were caused by worrying climate change trends

authorities urged vigilance from the central western coast down to the Spanish border.

Many parts of the region surpassed 40C, although storms were expected on the Atlantic coast on Sunday evening — signs that the stifling temperatures will “gradually regress to concern only

the eastern part of the country,” the weather service reported.

The baking heat failed to put off heavy metal aficionados attending the Hellfest festival at Clisson on the outskirts of the western city of Nantes, where temperatures soared beyond 40C.

With the River Seine off limits to bathing, scorched Parisians took refuge in the city’s fountains.

And at Vincennes Zoo on the outskirts of the capital, shaggy-haired lions licked at frozen blood fed to them by zookeepers, who monitored the enclosure’s animals for signs of dehydration. — AFP

Lanka troops open fire to contain fuel riots

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s military opened fire to contain rioting at a fuel station, officials said on Sunday as unprecedented queues for petrol and diesel were seen across the bankrupt country.

Troops fired in Visuвамadu, 365 kilometres north of Colombo, on Saturday night as their guard point was pelted with stones, army spokesman Nilantha Premaratne said.

“A group of 20 to 30 people pelted stones and damaged an army truck,” Premaratne said. Police said four civilians and three soldiers were wounded when the army opened fire for the first time to quell unrest linked to the worsening economic crisis.

As the pump ran out of petrol, motorists began to protest and the situation escalated into a clash with troops, police said.

Sri Lanka is suffering its



A member of Sri Lankan security personnel stands guard as a fuel station ran out of gasoline in Colombo. - AFP

worst economic crisis since independence, with the country unable to find dollars to import essentials, including food, fuel and medicines.

The nation’s 22 million population has been enduring acute shortages and long queues

for scarce supplies while President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has for months resisted calls to step down over mismanagement. Sri Lanka has deployed armed police and troops to guard fuel stations.

A motorist was shot dead by police in April at the central town

of Rambukkana when a clash erupted over the distribution of rationed petrol and diesel. Police said clashes involving motorists erupted at three locations over the weekend. At least six constables were wounded in one clash while seven motorists were arrested.

The government declared a two-week shutdown of state institutions and schools in a bid to reduce commuting and conserve depleting fuel stocks in the impoverished nation.

The country is also facing record high inflation and lengthy power blackouts, all of which have contributed to months of protests.

Four out of five people in Sri Lanka have started skipping meals as they cannot afford to eat, the UN has said, warning of a looming “dire humanitarian crisis” with millions in need of aid.

— AFP

Dentistry conference invites academic papers

KABEER YOUSUF
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MANGALURU, India: The first ACE-Karnataka conference, organised by Association of Conservative Dentistry and Endodontics of Karnataka and A B Shetty Memorial Institute of Dental Sciences under the NITTE (Deemed to be university) in Mangaluru has invited academic papers from experts in dentistry from across the world.

The high-profile convergence of nearly 300 specialists where hundreds of papers will be presented will be held in Mangaluru, on July 7, 8, and 9, 2022. The port city of the Indian state of Karnataka has become an educational hub for both domestic and international students over a period of time

“While equipping teachers and students to do research, it is important that we try to bridge the gap between academia and clinical practitioners,” says Dr Mitra N Hegde (pictured), Vice-Principal and Chair of the Organising Committee told the Observer.

“Popularising and disseminating research findings should be seriously attempted. We should continue to reach out and establish relationships agreeing on a strategy of co-operation and coordination with clinical practitioners and academia and exercise greater stewardship of resources,” Dr Mitra, who is also the Joint Secretary, ACE added.

This conference will



Dr Mitra N Hegde

have three plenary sessions, such as symposium, panel discussions and Q&A session which will foster discussions and is expected to inspire the students from a wide array of themes.

The conference is also expected to provide Industry Technology Platform – demonstration and hands on for all the registered

delegates and postgraduate students who will have the opportunity to present paper or e-poster pertaining to original research, case reports and reviews.

The Scientific Committee has also invited authors to submit their presentations for consideration and inclusion in the scientific programme has further mentioned that there is no restriction on the number of submission of papers/e-posters from an institution.

A participant cannot be author/co-author in more than one presentation and only candidates who have registered for the conference are eligible to submit the abstracts.

The last date to submit the online abstract is June 25 and shall not be longer than 300 words.

NEW PHILIPPINES V-P TAKES OATH



Philippines’ Vice President-elect Sara Duterte (C) takes her oath before supreme court associate justice Ramon Hernando and her mother Elizabeth Zimmerman and outgoing president Rodrigo Duterte during the inauguration ceremony near the city hall in Davao City. — AFP

KABUL

IS claims Kabul Sikh temple attack

The IS claimed responsibility for an attack on a Sikh temple in Afghanistan that killed one community member and a Taliban fighter.

In a message posted on its Amaq propaganda site, the IS group said Saturday’s attack targeted Hindus and Sikhs and the “apostates”. IS said one of its fighters “penetrated a temple for Hindu and Sikh polytheists in Kabul, after killing its guard, and opened fire on the pagans inside with his machine gun and hand grenades”. Two were killed and at least seven



others wounded in the raid.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said the attackers lobbed at least one grenade when they entered the temple, setting off a blaze. — AFP

KUTUPALONG

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh rally to ‘go home’

Tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh staged demonstrations demanding repatriation back to Myanmar, where they fled a brutal military crackdown five years ago. Almost a million Rohingya are confined to bamboo and tarpaulin shacks in 34 squalid camps in southeast Bangladesh, with no work, poor sanitation and little access to education.

Their increasingly restrictive host country has banned them from holding rallies since they staged a massive 100,000-strong



protest in August 2019.

But authorities allowed several groups of Rohingya to hold simultaneous “Go Home” marches and rallies ahead of World Refugee Day. — AFP

SULAIMANIYAH

Iraq confirms 13 cholera cases, scores suspected

A cholera outbreak in Iraq has infected at least 13 people and scores more suspected cases have been sent for analysis, most from the northern Kurdistan region, health officials said.

“Ten cases of cholera have been recorded in the province” of Sulaimaniyah, said Sabah Hawrami, district health chief in the autonomous Kurdistan region.

Another 56 suspected cases from the same province are being analysed by a central laboratory in the capital Baghdad — the only one



able to provide the diagnosis. The health ministry said one case had been registered in Kirkuk province, neighbouring Sulaimaniyah, while two were recorded in the southern province of Muthanna. — AFP



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In brief

■ BAMAKO



UN PEACEKEEPER KILLED IN MALI MINE BLAST

A UN peacekeeper was killed by a mine on Sunday in restive northern Mali as he was participating in a patrol, the head of the UN's MINUSMA Mali force El Ghassim Wane tweeted. The peacekeeper was part of the Guinean contingent in MINUSMA, a MINUSMA official said on condition of anonymity.

"He was first wounded and died of his injuries at our hospital in Kidal", he added. The latest death comes amid tense negotiations on the renewal of MINUSMA's mandate. A total of 175 of its peacekeepers have died in hostile acts. — **AFP**

■ BOGOTA



UNCERTAINTY REIGNS AS COLOMBIA VOTES

Colombia's election stations opened for voting in a presidential race filled with uncertainty, as ex-guerrilla Gustavo Petro and millionaire businessman Rodolfo Hernandez vie for power in a country saddled with widespread poverty, violence and other woes.

Abstention is expected to be high as voters face a stark choice between electing their first ever left-wing president or plumping for a maverick outsider dubbed the Colombian Donald Trump.

In Bogota, outgoing President Ivan Duque opened voting for Colombia's 39 million voters at 8 am. — **AFP**

■ PARIS



COASTAL STORMS WREAK HAVOC IN FRANCE

French rescue services have been working around the clock in the wake of storms along the Atlantic coast that left boats stranded at sea. Meanwhile, further north in Normandy, a kite surfer died after being caught by a strong gust of wind. Rescue crews were deployed more than 80 times with ships, helicopters and aeroplanes, assisted by the military and civil defence, the maritime prefecture in the port city of Brest announced.

Two men on a motorboat who were unable to communicate their position had to spend the night at sea before being located and rescued. — **dpa**

Nato chief: Ukraine war could last 'years'



**We must not weaken
in our support of
Ukraine, even if
the costs are high —
not only in terms
of military support
but also because of
rising energy and
food prices**

JENS STOLTENBERG

Nato Secretary-General

second visit to Kyiv, calling for the West to ensure Ukraine has the "strategic endurance to survive and eventually prevail".

Russian forces have directed their firepower at the east and south of Ukraine in recent weeks since failing in their bid to take the capital Kyiv after the lightning February 24 invasion.

Zelensky made a rare trip outside Kyiv on Saturday to



Protestors hold Greenpeace cardboard airplaner during a climate march called by Greenpeace and the ongoing Ukraine situation in Rotterdam. — **AFP**

the hold-out Black Sea city of Mykolaiv, and visited troops nearby and in the neighbouring Odessa region for the first time since the Russian invasion.

"We will not give away the south to anyone, we will return everything that's ours and the sea will be Ukrainian and safe", he said in a video posted on Telegram as he made his way back to Kyiv. He said he talked with troops and

police during his visit.

"Their mood is confident, and looking into their eyes it is obvious that they all do not doubt our victory", he said.

But Zelensky admitted that losses were "significant", adding: "Many houses were destroyed, civilian logistics were disrupted, there are many social issues."

Mykolaiv is a key target for Russia as it lies on the way to the

strategic Black Sea port of Odessa. Blockaded by Russia, Odessa residents have turned their attention to rallying the home front effort. "Everyday, including the weekend, I come to make camouflage netting for the army", said Natalia Pinchenkova, 49, behind a large Union flag, a show of thanks to Britain for its support for Ukraine since the conflict erupted. — **AFP**

Macron battles French left in tight parliament election



France's President Emmanuel Macron casts his ballot next to his wife Brigitte Macron during the second stage of French parliamentary elections at a polling station in Le Touquet, northern France. — **AFP**

PARIS: French voters were picking a new parliament on Sunday in a run-off ballot, with centrist President Emmanuel Macron's coalition seeking to maintain its majority in the face of a challenge from a newly formed left-wing alliance.

At almost 19 per cent by midday according to interior ministry figures, turnout was slightly higher than in last week's first-round ballot, although forecasters suggest participation will remain below 50 per cent by the time all polling stations close at 8:00 pm (1800 GMT).

The vote will be decisive for Macron's second-term agenda following his re-election in April, with the 44-year-old needing a majority to secure promised tax cuts and welfare reform and raise the retirement age.

Projections from polling firms suggest his "Together" coalition is on course to be the biggest party in the next National Assembly, but possibly short of the 289 seats

needed for a majority.

New left-wing coalition NUPES is hoping to spring a surprise, with the red-green collective promising to block Macron's agenda after uniting behind 70-year-old figurehead Jean-Luc Melenchon.

Falling short of the majority would force Macron into tricky alliances with other parties on the right to force through legislation.

The nightmare scenario for the president — seen as unlikely although not theoretically impossible — would be the left winning a majority and Melenchon heading the government.

"The vote is extremely open and it would be improper to say that things are settled one way or the other", Melenchon told reporters Friday during a final campaign stop in Paris.

Macron was left disappointed last weekend after the first round placed Together and NUPES neck-and-neck at around 26 per

cent.

The first-round vote served to whittle down candidates in most of the country's 577 constituencies to two finalists who are going head-to-head on Sunday. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen is also eyeing major gains for her National Rally party, which had just eight seats in the outgoing parliament.

The election caps an intense two-month sequence to elect a new president and parliament, with voter fatigue seen as one of the reasons for what is expected to be record-low turnout on Sunday.

Macron cast his ballot in northern seaside town Le Touquet alongside his wife Brigitte, while Melenchon voted in Mediterranean port city of Marseille. The contest between Together and NUPES has turned increasingly bitter over the last week, with Macron's allies seeking to paint their main opponents as dangerous far-leftists. — **AFP**

Tunisian protesters decry statute reform plans

TUNIS: Hundreds demonstrated on Sunday in Tunisia's capital against a planned referendum on constitutional changes and President Kais Saied's recent firing of dozens of judges.

Protesters in Tunis responded to calls from opposition organisations, including Saied's nemesis the Ennahdha party, chanting "constitution, liberty and dignity" and "the people want an independent judiciary", a correspondent said.

The new constitution is the centrepiece of reform plans by Saied and is set to go to referendum on July 25, exactly one year after he sacked the government and suspended parliament.

He has steadily extended his power grab since then, including by dissolving parliament in March. Earlier this month he sacked 57 judges, after accusing many of corruption and other crimes.

"The referendum is just nothing but a fraud", said Ali Larayedh, a leader from Ennahdha, which was parliament's biggest party and a key player in the government fired by the president.

"We are demonstrating against the exclusion of the

judicial authority and against the coup d'état that targets the constitution", he said.

The 2014 constitution, a hard-won compromise between Ennahdha and its secular rivals, created a system where both the president and parliament had executive powers.

It was adopted three years after the North African country's 2011 revolution. Rights groups have condemned Saied's firing earlier this month of the 57 judges as a "deep blow to judicial independence".

Saied is a former law professor elected in 2019 amid public anger against the political class in the North African nation.

He has organised a "national dialogue" around the constitutional reforms, but opponents including the powerful UGTT trade union confederation have boycotted it, on the grounds that it excludes key civil society actors and political parties.

A draft of the new constitution is due to be presented to Saied on Monday ahead of a referendum in the form of a simple yes/no vote.

Ennahdha warned earlier this month against dropping references to Islam in any new constitution. — **AFP**



Tunisian protesters chant slogans against President Kais Saied and the upcoming constitutional referendum at a rally in Tunis. — **AFP**

Some summer reflections for parents



MASSRAT SHAIKH

The writer is an educational psychologist

As we get settled into the summer, for parents, it is an excellent time to reflect on how the past year went. By engaging in intentional reflection, we can uncover what areas our children struggled with and what we, as parents can change to help them overcome those challenges for the next academic year.

Build relationship: A good beginning point is to reflect on the relationship we share with our children. A family is a child's second womb and sharing solid and secure relationships with parents helps children thrive in all areas of their lives, including academics. Summer offers closeness and the opportunity to build that bond again; it is worth considering what strategies can strengthen it.

Be resilient: It is sometimes

hard as parents to constantly make those small parenting decisions that make or break our children's world. When things slowdown in summer, it gives us time to reflect on our decisions. Something as small as allowing children to sleep an extra hour or have more screen time affects their performance at school. Resilience for parents looks like rethinking and adjusting those decisions to suit what is best for our children.

Unpack success: Summer is an excellent time to analyse our children's success and to know their strengths so we can build more of it the following year. These areas of strength may look like having a great year at sports in school or connecting more socially. Unpacking success helps to see which area our children

SUMMER OFFERS CLOSENESS AND OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS OF BOND AGAIN

did well in and how we can facilitate that next year.

Provide support: Summer is also the time to examine areas our children struggle academically. If a child's achievement level is lower than expected, summer is an excellent time to reflect on why they are not keeping up and help them fill those learning gaps.

Providing children with the proper support during summer is essential to their learning and for a successful next academic year. Summer should be seen as an

opportunity for catching up and focusing on strengthening academic skills.

Create new structures: Summer can be a good time of change for children. Summer is a small transition, but all transitions offer opportunities to break down familiar structures and create new ones. Helping children to break down old habits and learn new ones is often helpful for a fresh start.

Pump the brakes: Summer learning is vital for children, but it is also essential to pull the brakes. After a tumultuous year at school, we must give children and ourselves permission to rejuvenate in summer. Holidays should be relaxing and fun, and taking some time off is essential for children's mental wellbeing.

Give the real gift: When we as

parents brave the holiday season, it can quickly get overwhelming. However, we must remember that the true gift of parenting is what we give our children repeatedly, a hundred times each day, without realising it. It is a hug, a smile, a touch, a scolding, a sandwich, a story read, a bed tucked in, or a goodnight kiss. We offer our lap when our back hurts, and we offer our heart when it feels empty.

So many things, so rapidly readily given that we hardly notice them — but they are the fabric of family, new threads added many times each hour.

As we plunge into this time of giving more — it is a lovely, self-nurturing thing to reflect a bit on what may be, for each of us, the sacred essence of parenting.

Sudan wheat harvest waits to rot as hunger crisis looms

ABDELMONEIM ABU IDRIS ALI

Looking at the sacks of wheat stacked in Imad Abdullah's small home, no one would guess that Sudan's food security is hanging by a thread after an October coup and Russia's assault on Ukraine.

But the wheat farmer fears that the grain will soon rot, after his country's cash-strapped government backed out of promises to purchase it at incentivising prices. "It has been two months since I harvested the wheat and I can't store it in the house anymore," said Abdullah, pointing to the large sacks filled with ripened wheat crammed into his small house in Al Laota, in Gezira state, south of Sudan's capital.

He is one of thousands of farmers who have cultivated the grain as part of Sudan's largest agricultural scheme, named Al Gezira.

When Abdullah harvested in March, he was promised 43,000 Sudanese pounds (\$75) per sack — a price set by the government to encourage farmers to cultivate the grain.

"We used to sell the government our entire harvest. We never had to bring it home. We don't even have adequate storage places."

Sudanese officials have however declared in recent weeks that they will not be able to buy this season's entire harvest due to lack of funds.

Impoverished Sudan has for years been grappling with a grinding economic crisis, which deepened after last year's military coup prompted Western governments to cut crucial aid.

The October coup derailed a fragile transition put in place following the 2019 ouster of president Omar al Bashir.

Over 18 million people, nearly half the Sudanese population, are expected to be pushed into extreme hunger by September, according to United Nations estimates.

Russia's attack of Ukraine, both key grain suppliers, threatens to compound Sudan's existing food security troubles. Wheat imports from both nations make up between 70 and 80 per cent of Sudan's local market needs, according to a 2021 UN report.

Last month, dozens of wheat farmers from Sudan's Northern State staged a protest outside the agricultural bank after it refused to take their harvest.

"I grew 16 acres of wheat this season, filling some 120 sacks amounting to a total of 12 tonnes," farmer Modawi Ahmed said. He said the bank only agreed to buy less than half of his harvest, and he now fears the rest will spoil. — AFP

It's Macron vs the Left in a fierce battle for France's parliament

CONSTANT MÉHEUT AND AURELIEN BREEDEN

THE STAKES ARE HIGH FOR MACRON, GIVEN THAT A DEFEAT COULD HAMPER HIS MAJORITY AND HINDER HIS AMBITIOUS AGENDA

Five years ago, Amélie de Montchalin, a politician known more for her quiet technocratic skills than her oratory, easily won election to Parliament from this southern suburb of Paris and later became one of President Emmanuel Macron's ministers.

But at a small rally this past week, at risk of losing her seat to a left-wing opponent in this year's parliamentary elections, she launched into an uncharacteristically fiery tirade, accusing the left of promoting "a vision of disorder" that would lead France to "submission" to Russia.

If the left wins, de Montchalin told the crowd gathered in a sun-drenched square, "in a few weeks or a few months, there will be bankruptcies and unemployed people."

Her outburst reflected the bruising rhetorical battle that Macron's centrist forces and a coalition of left-wing candidates are waging before the second round of voting in the parliamentary elections on Sunday. The stakes are high for Macron, given that a defeat could hamper his majority in the National Assembly, France's more powerful house of Parliament, and hinder his ambitious agenda.

Only months ago, Macron was wooing the left as he sought re-election as president in a bid to keep the country's rising far right from winning power. Now, a left-wing coalition has become his No. 1 enemy.

Macron's supporters describe a potential victory by the coalition and its leader, hard-left politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon, as a catastrophe that would ruin France.

The left says Macron and his allies are panicking because they are losing their grip on power, and they accuse the president of staging photo ops in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, as he seeks to mediate in the Ukraine war instead of caring for French voters.

Both sides are desperately chasing the roughly 52.5 per cent of the French electorate who did not vote this past Sunday, the lowest level in the first round of a legislative election since 1958.

Polls and projections suggest it could be difficult for Macron's alliance of centrist parties, known as Ensemble, to retain the absolute majority that it enjoyed during his previous term and that allowed him to push legislation through relatively unimpeded.

Instead, the president could be left with a relative majority — more seats than any other political force, but not more than half of the 577 seats in the National Assembly — forcing him to reach across the aisle for certain bills.

"Even if he gets a majority, it is likely that he will have to negotiate more," said Olivier Rozenberg, an associate professor at Sciences Po in Paris. After five years of Macron's top-down governing style, which left many lawmakers feeling sidelined, "the logic of governing will probably be a little less vertical," Rozenberg said.

Weeks ago, Macron appeared likely to secure an absolute majority after convincingly defeating far-right leader Marine Le Pen in the presidential race. Over the past 20 years, voters have usually given their newly elected president a strong parliamentary backing.

Then, France's fractious leftist parties unexpectedly agreed to set aside major differences on foreign and economic policies, at least temporarily, and forge an alliance for the parliamentary election called NUPES, for Nouvelle Union Populaire

Écologique et Sociale, which includes Mélenchon's France Unbowed Party, and the Socialist, Green and Communist parties. In the first round last week, they finished neck and neck with Macron's alliance, with roughly 25 per cent of the vote.

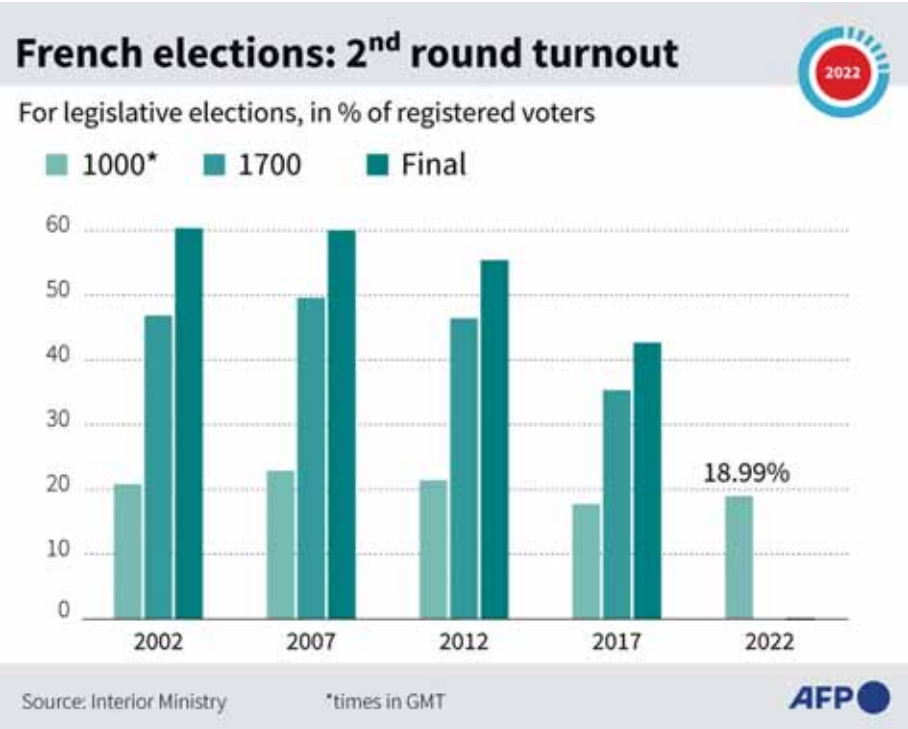
Pointing to the leftist alliance's proposals, which include overhauling France's Constitution and raising the monthly minimum wage to \$1,580, Macron's top lieutenants have compared Mélenchon with Hugo Chávez, the populist former Venezuelan leader.

They have warned that a leftist victory would return France to "Soviet regulation" and bring a "fiscal guillotine at all levels." They have also castigated Mélenchon as being too soft on Russia.

Jérôme Guedj, a Socialist who is running for the leftist coalition in the Essonne department against de Montchalin, lamented what he called "demonisation, caricature and amalgam" that reflected Macron's and his party's "panic" over possible defeat.

"It really reminds me of 1981," Guedj said, referring to the year when Socialist leader François Mitterrand won the presidency with support from French Communists. "People were saying, 'There will be Russian tanks on the Place de la Concorde.'"

— *New York Times*



Like father like son..



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

At work, everyone needs a job description that helps keeping employees on track when handling tasks for their companies. However, have you ever thought of what is a job description for fathers at home? Perhaps, no one has ever asked about the key role of being a father and responsible of bringing up kids! From earliest times, men have been expected to lead their families, and every man should be proud of bearing this responsibility.

As a matter of fact, fathers are playing a more active role in parenting nowadays. They do not just take the role of a provider, a protector, and a disciplinarian in the family. Today their role has evolved and fathers are now embracing a whole load of new skills and values. Fathers are similarly like mothers, standing as pillars in the development of a child's emotional well-being.

Children look to their fathers to provide a feeling of security, both physical and emotional as well as promoting inner growth and strength. Studies have shown that when fathers are affectionate and supportive, it greatly affects a child's cognitive and social development. It also instills an overall sense

of well-being and self-confidence. Fathers' role can have a large impact on a child and helps shaping him or her into a person they become.

FATHERS NOT ONLY INFLUENCE A CHILD FROM INSIDE, RATHER HOW A CHILD INTERACTS AND HAVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE TOO

Fathers not only influence a child from inside, rather how a child interacts and have relationships with people too. The way a father treats

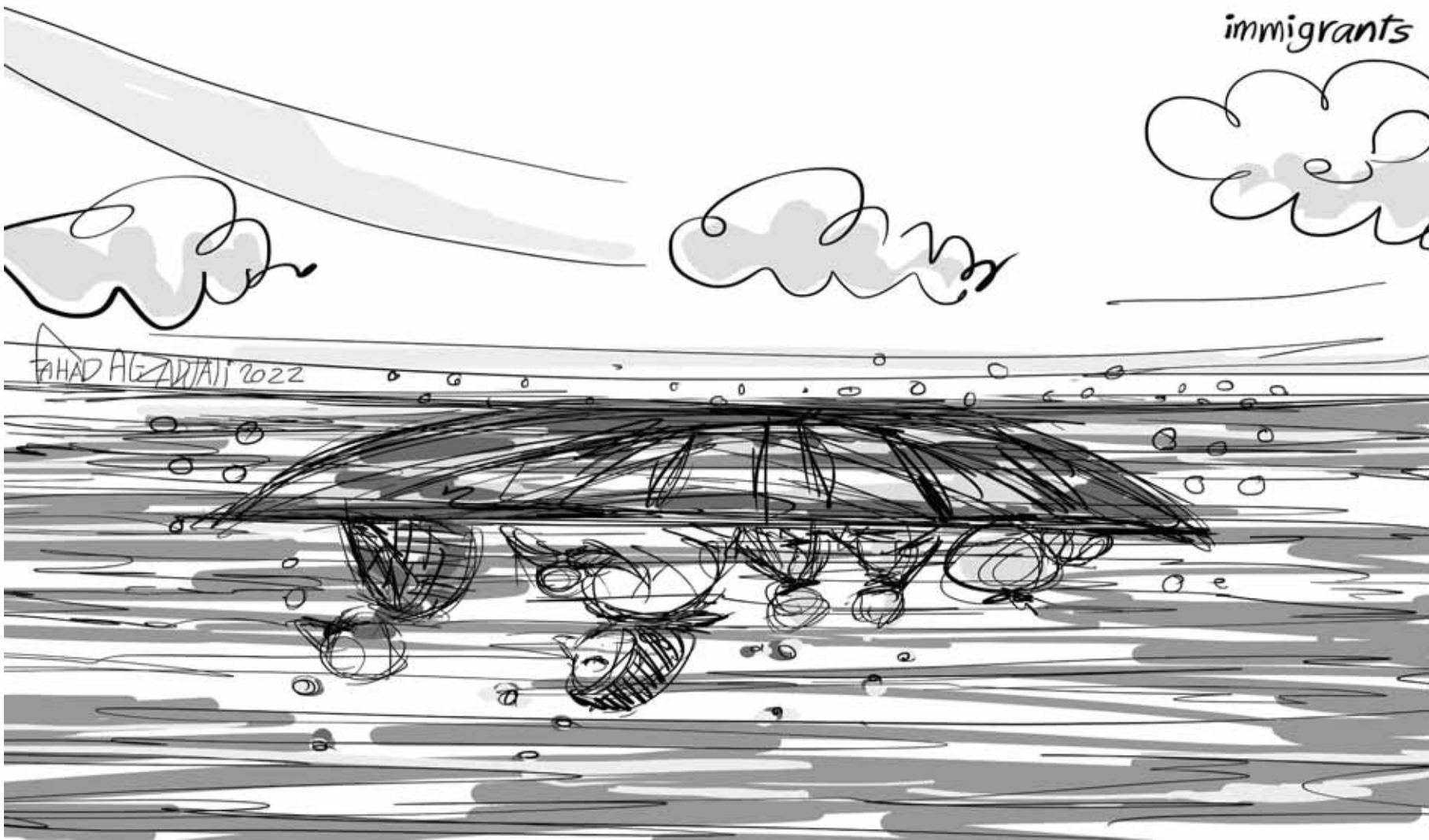
his child will influence what he/she looks for in others. Friends, lovers, and spouses will all be chosen based on how the child perceives the meaning of the relationship with his or her father. The patterns a father sets in the relationships with his children will indicate how his children relate with other people.

Daughters, for instance, depend on their fathers for security and emotional support. A daughter learns from her father what a good relationship with a man is like. If a father is loving and gentle, his daughter will look for those qualities in men when she gets older. If her father is strong and brave, she will definitely relate closely to men of a similar character. Children often take fathers as their role model; a father represents a guide and a counsellor to his child.

Of course, none of our fathers were perfect, so it is important for us to understand their shortcomings and carry forward with their strengths. In fact, a father is neither an anchor to hold us back, nor a sail to take us there, but a guiding light whose love shows us the way. As it has been claimed that teaching a son affects a grandchild too. The imprint of a father remains forever on his family; as like father like son, every good tree makes good fruits.

Becoming a father means you have to be a role model for your son and be someone he can look up to. Children always thrive when they have an involved father, someone who loves them, knows them, guides them, and helps them achieve their goals and make their dreams come true. Not only that, when a father shows compassion, hope and belief when his child needs it most. Actually, there is no greater need in childhood than the protection and compassion of a father.

Yes, fatherhood is a tough task and kids will make you suffer; when they are babies, their crying keeps you up at night. Their teenage troubles might rob you of more sleep. However, until you have a son of your own, you will never know the joy, the love beyond feeling that resonates in the heart of a father as he looks at his son. Profound thanks and sincere gratitude and appreciation to all fathers in the world for their love, compassion, hard work, sacrifice and putting their family first always.



Cooling the hottest cities



RUSHAD NANAVATTY

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RUSHAD NANAVATTY, SHEILA AGGARWAL-KHAN

Extreme heat is having its moment in the sun. This year's headlines have been as relentless as the temperatures: "Spain endures record heatwave," "Devastating heatwave in South Asia," "Texas shatters heat record," "Can you even call deadly heat 'extreme' anymore?"

This worldwide coverage has called attention to a massive challenge that will only grow in scope and seriousness. Nowhere are cooling measures more urgent than in our cities, where streets, buildings, industries, and vehicles could increase temperatures by a catastrophic 4° Celsius by the end of the century, putting the world's poorest people at highest risk.

The search for solutions is already under way, but it needs to gather momentum. At last year's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), the Cool Coalition, a 120-organisation partnership led by the UN Environment Programme and including RMI, released a comprehensive guide to sustainable urban cooling. And in Davos last month, the Cool Coalition and the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center launched an online Heat Action Platform that makes it easy for policymakers and planners to identify the solutions most relevant to them.

To stay ahead of the problem, municipal leaders will need to embrace many measures, including smarter urban design. To draw cool air through a city, planners and developers can orient streets and building heights with the prevailing winds and develop more strategically placed green and blue spaces. They can also create more shaded commuter corridors for pedestrians and cyclists, and plan more diverse, mixed-use developments that lend themselves to efficient district cooling systems (and less heat-emitting car traffic).

Planting more trees in concrete jungles also could make a significant difference. Urban forests and parks can be 7°C cooler than treeless neighbourhoods, and a street lined with trees can be 3°C cooler than one without. Cities from Freetown and Athens to Melbourne and Milan are already reaping the benefits of using urban nature as a cooling mechanism – one which also improves stormwater management, sequesters carbon, increases biodiversity, and provides recreation.

Another common-sense measure is to resurface our cities so that they shed heat rather than absorb it. The typical asphalt road absorbs up to 95 per cent of the sunlight that lands on it, and concrete roads and sidewalks absorb up to 75 per cent. These scorching surfaces disproportionately harm the outdoor labour force, those without a

personal vehicle, and the poor who live in neighbourhoods dominated by such materials. By using lighter-coloured construction materials that increase the reflectivity of these surfaces by just 10 per cent, we can reduce their temperatures by up to 5°C – a potentially lifesaving difference.

Better buildings are also key. Cooling a poorly designed building with air conditioning is like running a faucet into

enforce them.

Moreover, air conditioning, where it is used, can be made more climate friendly. As matters stand, it is both a vital enabler of productivity and a major source of urban heat and emissions. By 2050, AC units could consume as much energy as the combined US, German, and Japanese economies do today. The most common refrigerant they use is nearly 2,000 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a global warming agent. Accordingly, regulators need to set standards that exclude the worst-performing units from the market; and the public and private sector need to work together on marketing campaigns, financing solutions, and incentives to move buyers toward climate-friendly products.

Urban planners and developers should also consider district cooling systems, which serve many buildings with a single chiller plant. Because these systems can deliver efficiencies of scale without heating city air as much as individual AC units do, they should be the default technology choice in large new commercial and mixed-use developments, townships, and campuses.

Finally, policymakers in some cities should consider various options of last resort to protect the most vulnerable. In India, people joke that the reason Bollywood movies are so long is that film-makers want to give people a chance to spend four hours in an air-conditioned theater. But, as this spring's devastating heat wave showed, the value of cool spaces is no longer a joke.

Cities in areas prone to extreme heat will need to invest in a range of communal spaces that are accessible to the most vulnerable when heat and humidity exceed the survivability threshold. These could be movie theaters, shopping malls, schools, places of worship, swimming pools, parks, transit hubs, or dedicated cooling centers.

AS GLOBAL TEMPERATURES INCREASE, THE WORLD'S DENSE, HEAVILY PAVED URBAN JUNGLES ARE INCREASINGLY BEING EXPOSED TO EXTREME HEAT, WITH THEIR POORER INHABITANTS FACING THE GREATEST RISKS. FORTUNATELY, THE BASIC COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN COOLING ARE WELL KNOWN, AND MOST ARE AFFORDABLE

a leaky bucket. By contrast, good building design can minimise the need for air conditioning altogether. For example, light-coloured, reflective "cool roofs" are inexpensive and can reject 90 per cent of the heat energy that lands on them, making a huge difference even where other measures aren't viable, such as in informal housing.

Passive building-efficiency measures like orientation, insulation, reflection, shading, and ventilation are not new. But we must enact more ambitious building codes and performance standards, and invest in the institutional capacity to



This worldwide coverage has called attention to a massive challenge that will only grow in scope and seriousness.

sport

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Oman U-17 team set for West Asian Championships

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Oman U-17 football team is all set to kick off their opening match at the West Asian U-17 Championships against the hosts Jordan team on Tuesday. The team arrived in Amman city on Sunday after they completed a successful external camp in Kuwait. The preparatory abroad camp in Kuwait featured two

friendly games against the hosts. Oman team managed to end both encounters on victory note as the first match finished at 1-0 while the following game ended at 3-1 late on Saturday. Oman's Al Haitham al Shukaili was the top star in both warm up fixtures as he netted the winner in the first friendly game while he netted two goals in the second warm up fixture. The third goal was scored by Al Harith al Mashakhi.

In both preparatory games, the head coach Pablo Herrero Fernandez tested different faces to evaluate the readiness of the players ahead of West Asian event. Moreover, the coaching staff executed several tactical scenarios and finalised the starting line up ahead of Asian championships event. The friendly games against Kuwait acted as an opportunity for players to get into regional matches experience as the team

played local games during the past few days. The team will have two more training sessions in Jordan venues ahead of beginning the first match of the tournament. Oman team will start their first clash at West Asian U-17 Championships on Tuesday in Group A as they will meet the hosts Jordan in the opener. In the following game, Oman Junior team will face Iraq on Thursday. Then, Oman will conclude the

group matches with an encounter against Yemen on Saturday. The West Asian U-17 Championships will be the primary official assignment for Spanish coach Pablo Herrero Fernandez, who began his career as head coach of the Oman national U-17 football team earlier this year. Coach Herrero Fernandez will target highly in this championship and secure advanced results. Oman squad: Fernas al Jabri, Helmi al

Balushi, Al Harith al Mushaikhi, Yasser al Balushi, Momen al Souli, Anas al Ghadani, Tamim al Buraiki, Hamza al Saadi, Jassim al Dhaeen, Marwan al Noobi, Emad al Hadi, Haitham Khareef, Al Hussain al Balushi, Abdullah al Maqbali, Mohammed al Balushi, Abdul Nasser al Hasani, Zaher al Aysari, Abdullah al Rawahi, Adnan al Mushaifri, Taha al Hinai, Al Haitham al Shukaili, Mohammed Ghanim and Syaf Mustafa.

■ ENDURANCE RACE



The Oman Equestrian Federation announced on holding a qualifying race for endurance at a distance of 40 km and 80 km, on the beach of Al Dahariz in Salalah on July 2. This event is part of preparations for the main endurance race championship which will be held at end of July which is part of the tourism sporting activities for Salalah Khareef 2022 season.

Oman women’s futsal team suffer defeat against Kuwait

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Oman women’s national futsal team suffered to a 6-1 loss against Kuwait team in the opener of the third edition at West Asian Federation Women’s Futsal Championship which is under way in Saudi Arabia until July 24. The match was held in the King Abdullah Sports City Hall in Jeddah on Saturday night.

Oman women’s team entered with high spirits while the opponent Kuwait team tried to score an early goal in the first minutes of the first half. Later, they managed to open the scoring account and dominated in the game. Oman’s only goal in the match scored by Jinat al Musallami.

Oman’s women’s national futsal team head coach, Maha



Jounod, said that the team received a defeat from the runner up of the 2nd edition of the GCC Games in Kuwait. “ We had bad luck to begin with a tough game against Kuwait team who have good faces in the squad and the players are together since long time and harmony is at high level among them. Due to lack

of technical experience, there were many technical mistakes by the national team players which caused entrance of many goals. Despite the results, it is a good step start for a team with a training schedule of one month only. We are looking forward for the following clash against Saudi Arabia,” she said

Scottish teenage talent Ramsay signs for Liverpool

LONDON: Calvin Ramsay said the examples of how young players Trent Alexander-Arnold and Harvey Elliott have flourished at Liverpool persuaded him to join them from Aberdeen for pre-season training. “There’s obviously a pathway here,” said Ramsay about the potential for young players to establish themselves in the first team. “That’s one of the reasons I chose it as well. It’s not just a massive club, they give young

ons and a 17.5% sell-on clause. The Scottish under-21 international will join up with Jurgen Klopp’s first team for pre-season training. “There’s obviously a pathway here,” said Ramsay about the potential for young players to establish themselves in the first team. “That’s one of the reasons I chose it as well. It’s not just a massive club, they give young



players chances in the first team. “So if I can come in pre-season, put my mark down, then there’s no reason why I can’t push to get in the first-team squad.” Ramsay was named young player of the year by the Scottish Football Writers’ Association after an impressive season. He played 33 times for Aberdeen, scoring one goal and providing nine assists. “I’m just buzzing and it’s a

dream come true really to be here,” the defender said. “It was a dream come true to play for Aberdeen, and now to be at one of the biggest, if not the biggest club in the world, it’s a massive achievement and I’m looking forward to trying to show the fans what I’ve got.” Klopp said he was delighted to have secured another young player with plenty of potential. — AFP



Japan power past Australia to take third spot

TASHKENT: Japan defeated Australia 3-0 to finish third in the AFC U23 Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2022 at the Pakhtakor Stadium on Saturday.

Kein Sato opened the scoring with a Jordan Courney-Perkins own goal doubling Japan's lead before the half-time break. Shota Fujio confirmed the emphatic win midway through the second half.

Both teams came into the playoff having suffered disappointing defeats in the semi-finals but Japan started the brighter as they dominated the early proceedings with Shunsuke Mito having the first sight on goal in the fifth minute but fired his strike into the side netting.

The Australian defence had to be on their toes to fend off the early pressure, but a failed clearance by Courney-Perkins two minutes later saw Sato pounce on the loose ball, before letting loose a crackling shot from just inside the box that deflected off the inside of the crossbar before settling into the back of the net.

Stung by the goal, the Olyroos began pushing Japan back with Ramy Najjarine forcing goalkeeper Zion Suzuki into making his first save in the 17th minute.

The end to end action continued with Kuryu Matsuki testing goalkeeper Nicholas Bilokapic — who was making his tournament

debut — in the 20th minute, before Australia's Bernardo Oliveira threatened two minutes later but put too much power in his chipped effort.

Japan should have gone two up in the 23rd minute when Matsuki's pass found an unmanned Mito at the edge of the box, but the Australians breathed a sigh of relief as the Albirex Niigata midfielder saw his effort rebound off the crossbar. Japan's persistence, however, saw them finally double their lead in the 40th minute when Yamamoto curled in a corner kick over a sea of players with the unfortunate Kai Trewin turning the ball into his own net.

Australia looked determined to mount a fight back in the second half, with substitute Lewis Miller heading just wide in the 52nd minute, before Najjarine collected Jordan Bos' perfectly weighted through ball five minutes later but Suzuki was on hand to deny him.

Australia, however, were let down by poor defending again in the 63rd minute when Matsuki picked out an unmarked Fujio in the area, with the substitute making no mistake with his close range effort.

Australia continued trying but the Japanese defence stood firm to take home the bronze medals.

— AFC

Zidane still has 'flame' to continue coaching amid PSG speculation

PARIS: Zinedine Zidane says he still has the "flame" to continue his managerial career, despite a year out of the game after his departure from Real Madrid.

The Frenchman departed Santiago Bernabeu for a second time at the end of the 2020-21 season, having guided the club to a hat-trick of Champions League triumphs during his first term in charge and won 11 trophies in all during his time there.

Zidane has since been linked with a number of jobs, including in his home country where he was touted as the front runner to succeed Mauricio Pochettino at Paris Saint-Germain, as well as Didier Deschamps' possible successor as France head coach beyond Qatar 2022.



French football coach and former footballer Zinedine Zidane

With Nice boss Christoph Galtier now in the driving seat to take the reins at Parc des Princes, Zidane's time in the wilderness looks set to continue.

But the former World Cup winner, who turns 50 this month, hopes to return to the dugout without having to leap straight into any job that becomes available.

"I want to continue," he said. "I still have this flame. Football is my passion.

"But I am almost 50 years old and fulfilled. I am happy, and that's the most important thing." — dpa

Mbappe mulled France retirement after Euro penalty miss

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe considered retiring from France duty after being criticised for his displays at Euro 2020, according to French Football Federation (FFF) president Noel LeGraet.



The 23-year-old failed to score in any of his four outings in last year's competition, with France surprisingly being eliminated by Switzerland in the last 16.

Paris Saint-Germain forward Mbappe missed the decisive spot-kick as the reigning world champions suffered a shock defeat on penalties following a 3-3 draw after extra time.

Mbappe was subjected to much of the criticism at the time, and FFF chief Le Graet has revealed just how much that affected the former Monaco star.

"I met with him after the Euros. He felt that the federation had not defended him after his missed penalty and the criticism he faced," Le Graet told Le Journal du Dimanche.

"We met for five minutes in my office. He was angry, he didn't want to play for the French team any more — which he obviously didn't mean.

"You know how it is; he's a winner, he was very frustrated, like all of us, by the elimination. He's so media-friendly. He's a great guy, much more collective than people think."

Mbappe has gone on to play a further nine times for France since last year's disappointing Euro showing, helping his country to qualify for this year's World Cup in Qatar. — dpa

Fraser-Pryce storms to impressive 100m victory in Paris

PARIS: Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce hammered home her status as world championship favourite on Saturday by equalling her world best time this year to win the 100m at the Paris Diamond League meeting.

The veteran Jamaican sprinter triumphed in 10.67sec, shrugging off the crushing 30-degree heat at the city's Charlety stadium.

A two-time Olympic champion over 100m, the 35-year-old Fraser-Pryce equalled the 2022 best time she set in Nairobi in May.

The nine-time world champion's win illustrated her threat to reigning Olympic champion Elaine Thompson-Herah at next month's world championships in Eugene, Oregon.

Both will meet next week at the Jamaican trials.

"I feel very good, technically it was very good. The goal is always to be on top technically, then the lap times follow," said Fraser-Pryce.

"Physically I was good too.

Running 10.6, only a few sprinters can achieve that," she added.

Britain's Daryll Neita was second on Saturday in 10.99sec with Marie-Josée Ta Lou of Ivory Coast third in 11.01sec.

Fraser-Pryce has already qualified for the 100m in Eugene as she is the defending champion.

However, she said she has "not decided yet" on whether she will attempt the sprint double in Oregon.

"We'll see if I'm ready to do it physically and mentally," she had said on Friday.

After racing to 10.05 seconds over the 100m in Oslo on Thursday, Andre De Grasse returned to his favoured 200m in the French capital.

But the Canadian Olympic gold medallist was only fourth on Saturday in a race won by Luxolo Adams of South Africa in 19.82sec.

Ukraine's Yaroslava Mahuchikh, silver medallist at the 2019 world championships and bronze medal



Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce (C) competes in the women's 100 metre event during the IAAF Wanda Diamond League athletics meeting at The Charlety Stadium in Paris. — AFP

winner at the 2020 Olympics, won the high jump with a season-best 2.01m. Mahuchikh won on her

second attempt, improving on her previous season-leading 2.0m at the Eugene Diamond League meet.

She tried and failed three times at 2.05m, a centimetre above her career best.

Mahuchikh topped an all-Ukraine podium in the event ahead of Iryna Gerashchenko (1.98m) and Yuliya Levchenko (1.95m).

There was also a season best in the 3,000m steeplechase for Bahrain's Winfred Mutile Yavi.

The 22-year-old won in a time of 8min 56.55sec, making her the fourth best performer in the history of the discipline.

Behind her, Ethiopia's Sembo Alemayehu, only 17 years old, ran in 9min 09.19sec.

Close to a world record in the 110m hurdles last week, Devon Allen of the United States, who plans to juggle his sporting career between American football and athletics, won in 13.16sec.

His performance came just 48 hours after his 13.22sec run in Oslo.

In the 100m hurdles, Nigeria's Tobi Amusan broke the African record in 12.41sec, the third best run of the season. — AFP

As teenagers make noise at the pool, veterans save energy



USA's Katie Ledecky competes to win a heat for the women's 1500m freestyle event during the Budapest 2022 World Aquatics Championships at Duna Arena in Budapest. — AFP

BUDAPEST: While many old hands conserved energy on a relaxed Sunday morning of heats at the World Swimming Championships in Budapest, several teenagers were prepared to roil the waters.

One young swimmer in a hurry was Romanian 17-year-old David Popovici.

He attacked from the start of his 200m freestyle heat and finished easily fastest in qualifying in 1min 45.18sec.

South Korean Hwang Sunwoo who is 19, was 0.61sec behind, followed by Austrian Felix Auboeck, who was fourth in Saturday's 400m free final.

Briton Tom Dean, the Olympic champion, was next.

Saturday's 400m top two, Australian Elijah Winnington and German Lukas Martens qualified comfortably.

In contrast, Katie Ledecky was in energy-saving mode as she won her heat in the longest pool event, the 1500m, in 15min 47.02sec.

That was almost 27 seconds outside her world record, but more than nine seconds ahead

of the next-best swimmer, Italian Simona Quadrella.

Ledecky, the world record holder and Olympic champion, had her run of three straight world titles broken when she was too ill to race the 1500 final in Gwangju three years ago after swimming fastest in qualifying.

Quadrella took advantage in South Korea to grab the gold.

Sunday morning opened with the heats of the women's 100m backstroke.

None of the 16 swimmers who advanced to the semis needed to match their best times over the last 12 months.

American Regan Smith was fastest followed by Canadian Kylie Massie, the defending champion.

Two 17-year-olds, Claire Curzan, from the United States, and Wan Letian from China, were the next two quickest. World record holder Kaylee McKeown scratched to focus on the women's 200m medley, an Australian team spokesman said. The backstroke semi-finals on Sunday evening and the medley final are just 30 minutes apart. — AFP

Roach puts West Indies on verge of victory against battling Bangladesh



NORTH SOUND, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: Veteran pacer Kemar Roach's enduring quality and consistency put the West Indies within 35 runs of victory over Bangladesh going into the fourth day of the first Test.

His five for 53 from 24.5 overs in the Bangladesh second innings total of 245 looked, briefly, as if it would be overshadowed though by a stunning West Indies collapse in pursuit of a modest target of 84 as the hosts slipped to nine for three late on the third day Saturday.

Those three wickets by seamer Khaled Ahmed — he removed captain Kraigg Brathwaite, Raymon Reifer and Nkrumah

Bonner in quick succession — lit a fire under the Bangladeshis.

Although opener John Campbell and fellow-Jamaican Jermaine Blackwood avoided any further alarms in taking the score to 49 at the close, the visitors will still be clinging to hopes of more miraculous events on Sunday morning.

Their spirit and energy in that final passage of play was probably sparked by a 123-run seventh-wicket partnership between captain Shakib Al Hasan (63) and wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan (64) just a couple hours earlier which saved the tourists from the ignominy of an innings defeat. — AFP



Rain man Verstappen takes pole position for Canadian Grand Prix

MONTREAL: World champion and series leader Max Verstappen drove expertly in difficult wet conditions in his Red Bull on Saturday to secure pole position for the Canadian Grand Prix.

In an intriguing and entertaining qualifying session, the 24-year-old Dutchman clocked a best lap in one minute and 21.299 seconds, beating nearest rival two-time world champion Fernando Alonso of Alpine by seven-tenths of a second. Verstappen will start his 150th race from the prime start place after claiming his 15th pole in pursuit of a 26th career victory.

His pole ends a run of four in a row by title rival Charles Leclerc who starts Sunday's race from the back of the grid after taking a new power unit on his Ferrari.

"We stayed calm, we made no mistakes, so of course super happy with that, with pole position here — and also to be back here in Montreal", said Verstappen. The 40-year-old Alonso put in a dazzling late lap to delight the crowd and outpace fellow-Spaniard Carlos Sainz of Ferrari who qualified third ahead of a reinvigorated Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes.

"It feels great. It was an



Red Bull Dutch driver Max Verstappen (C) gives the thumbs up as he poses with Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc (L) and Alpine Spanish driver Fernando Alonso following the qualifying session for the Canada Formula 1 Grand Prix on June 18, 2022, at Circuit Gilles-Villeneuve in Montreal. — AFP

unbelievable weekend so far for us, thanks to the wet conditions. The car was mega", said Alonso.

Kevin Magnussen wound up fifth ahead of his Haas team-mate Mick Schumacher, Esteban Ocon in the second Alpine and George Russell in the second Mercedes.

FIRSTS FOR SCHUMACHER, ZHOU

It was Schumacher's best qualifying performance since arriving in Formula One last year.

Daniel Ricciardo was ninth for McLaren ahead of Zhou Guanyu of Alfa Romeo, the Chinese driver reaching the top ten for the first time on a day of the unexpected.

After heavy rain overnight and through the morning, the temperature was only 11 degrees when Race Control declared the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve to be an official 'wet track' for the session.

Another big crowd turned out, bedecked in colourful plastic ponchos and anoraks to greet the

return of F1 after a Covid-caused three-year absence.

All 20 drivers went out immediately to test the conditions in the opening qualifying session, the entire field running on full-wet tyres.

The track appeared to be wetter than it had been in final practice when Alonso was quickest.

Russell set the early pace before Verstappen and Sainz took over only for the Mercedes man to respond again before Magnussen went quickest for Haas.

As a dry line began to emerge, Valtteri Bottas took over on top as the times tumbled with dramatic affect, Sainz again taking his Ferrari top before running on at Turn Three and reversing to re-join the fray.

Amid the chaos, Verstappen stayed calm to go quickest again ahead of Alonso while, unexpectedly after shining in third practice, both Aston Martin men, local star Lance Stroll and four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, were eliminated.

Out with them went AlphaTauri's Pierre Gasly, Canada's second hope Nicholas Latifi of Williams and Yuki Tsunoda in the second Alpha Tauri. — AFP

Zalatoris, Fitzpatrick share US Open lead as course bares teeth

BROOKLINE, UNITED STATES: England's Matt Fitzpatrick and American Will Zalatoris, each chasing his first major title, shared the lead after Saturday's third round of the US Open as brisk wind and brutal rough tormented golf's top stars.

Fitzpatrick birdied three of the last five holes at The Country Club but a closing bogey left him level with Zalatoris, last month's PGA Championship runner-up, on four-under par 206, one ahead of defending champion Jon Rahm after 54 holes.

"I knew it was going to play hard and I just needed to stay patient", Zalatoris said. "I knew if I



make an early bogey or two, don't change the game plan, don't try to get extra aggressive because that's how you make a mess of it."



Zalatoris, also last year's Masters runner-up, fired a three-under 67 while Fitzpatrick, the 2013 US Amateur winner at The Country

Club, fired a 68.

"Wind was really strong. It made it tough", Fitzpatrick said. "You had to be switched on with the way you were hitting it, where you were missing it, and I think that was why it was a great challenge. Really happy with my score." The Country Club bared its teeth in formidable conditions to humble world number two Rahm, four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, top-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler and two-time major winner Collin Morikawa among others. "It was one of the toughest days on a golf course I've had in a long time", McIlroy said after a 73. — AFP





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Oman’s first crowdfunding platform EthisX set for launch this week

New era: Nation's first crowdfunding platform to allow companies to raise funds through equity crowdfunding (ECF) and peer-2-peer (P2P) financing that includes sukuk and micro-sukuk

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

International ethical investment and social finance platform operator Ethis Group will formally launch its keenly-awaited EthisX crowdfunding platform on Thursday, June 23, 2022, heralding a new era in fin-tech-based crowdfunding services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch, set to take place at the College of Banking and Financial Services (CBFS) at Bausher, will be attended by top officials of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), SME Development Authority, and a number of local and international stakeholders and partner institutions.

Earlier in March this year, Kuala Lumpur — Malaysia headquartered Ethis Group became the first international operator to receive a licence from the Omani capital market regulator to provide crowdfunding services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Group's EthisX crowdfunding platform will allow companies to raise funds through equity crowdfunding (ECF) and peer-2-peer (P2P) financing that includes sukuk and micro-sukuk.

As a first-of-its-kind cross-border Ethical Private Capital Marketplace, EthisX will also be able to offer direct shariah-compliant investments into SME companies



THE GROUP'S ETHISX CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM WILL ALLOW COMPANIES TO RAISE FUNDS THROUGH EQUITY CROWDFUNDING (ECF) AND PEER-2-PEER (P2P) FINANCING THAT INCLUDES SUKUK AND MICRO-SUKUK. AS A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND CROSS-BORDER ETHICAL PRIVATE CAPITAL MARKETPLACE, ETHISX WILL ALSO BE ABLE TO OFFER DIRECT SHARIAH-COMPLIANT INVESTMENTS INTO SME COMPANIES AND SPECIAL PURPOSE VEHICLE (SPV) PROJECTS FROM OMAN AND AROUND THE GLOBE.

and special purpose vehicle (SPV) projects from Oman and around the globe.

Thursday's launch event will also feature a number of presentations focusing on the theme, 'Entrepreneurship Haven: From Idea to Profit Through Crowdfunding', according to Mohamed Shehzad bin Mohamed Islam, Chief Executive Officer of Ethis Investment Platform LLC (EIP).

"The main agenda is to officially launch EthisX in the Sultanate of Oman, introduce the concept of

crowdfunding and bring together the major stakeholders supporting Oman's entrepreneurship ecosystem. Our goal is to promote entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman and particularly contribute towards enhancing the start-up and business funding ecosystem in the country.

Accordingly, we have invited interested impactful entrepreneurs, passionate investors, government officials and prospective business partners, among others, to participate in this event", he said.

In addition to an introduction

to the EthisX crowdfunding platform by Mohamed Shehzad, there will be keynote addresses by top officials representing the SMEs Development Authority and the CMA. Mohammed bin Said al Abri, the Vice-President — Capital Market Sector of the CMA will also officiate at the EthisX launch.

A key highlight of the session is a panel discussion on the role of crowdfunding and fintech in supporting the Digital Oman Strategy and Oman Vision 2040. A second-panel discussion will focus on the importance of fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman.

Two prominent local start-ups, Thawani and Sehatek Advanced Medical Care will also share their respective journeys.

To participate, register at: Entrepreneurship Haven: Idea To Profit Through CF Tickets, Thursday, June 23, 2022 at 8:30 AM | Eventbrite

Oman Air to operate 112 weekly flights on Muscat-Salalah sector during khareef

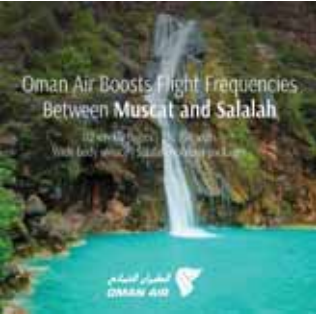
BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, will ramp up flight frequencies on its Muscat-Salalah-Muscat sector to a total of 112 weekly flights from June 23 till September 11, 2022.

The airline offers wide-body service between Muscat and Salalah, including the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus A330 in addition to the Boeing 737, with eight flights per day in each direction, providing flexible travel and connecting flight options. The first flight from Muscat departs at 02:05, and the last flight departs at 20:20. Salalah's first flight leaves at 04:50, while the last flight leaves at 22:45.

"Salalah is teeming with tourists from all across the Gulf region at this time of year", stated Ahmed bin Ali al Mahrouqi, Regional Vice-President — Oman & GCC.

"Verdant mountains, cool drizzle and breathtaking natural settings serve as a magnet to tourists who wish to get away from hotter climes. Year after year, the number of people who are fascinated by the wonderful khareef phenomenon that surrounds the beautiful city of Salalah grows dramatically."



Salalah packages were also created by Oman Air Holidays, allowing travellers to see some of the most popular tourist attractions in and around Salalah.

Each package is designed to give tourists a taste of some of the city's most popular attractions.

Throughout its network, the airline has initiated numerous promotional activities aimed at travel agencies, tour operators, and the general public to unveil its new packages which are created with care for anyone in search of a bespoke, unforgettable holiday experience.

"To satisfy this burgeoning demand, Oman Air has boosted its Salalah frequency, now offering 238,754 seats and convenient connections between Salalah and major destinations via Muscat", Al Mahrouqi said. "Salalah's reputation as a top tourist destination during the khareef (monsoon) season is reflected by the addition of flights on the sector."

Oman’s public debt set for substantial decline: IMF

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

The Sultanate of Oman welcomed the concluding statement of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff visit following its mission in Muscat, which came as part of the preparations for 2022 Article IV consultations.

In the statement, the IMF staff noted their appreciation of the discussions held with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Oman Investment Authority, National Centre for Statistics and Information and other institutions.

The concluding statement lauded the substantial efforts

exerted by the Omani government to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and foster recovery, as well as the fiscal measures targeting social support and helping private sector recovery in the pandemic's aftermath.

It also commended the role of control measures adopted by the government to strengthen public finance and the CBO's efforts to enhance regulatory and supervisory frameworks.

Regarding the outlook, real GDP grew by 3 per cent in 2021, and it is expected to grow at a rate of 4.5 per cent in 2022, driven primarily by the hydrocarbon activities. The IMF projects improvement in fiscal balance indicators through achieving an



estimated surplus of 5.5 per cent of GDP in 2022, with surpluses persisting over the medium-term.

It also expects a decline in the central government debt from about 63 per cent of GDP in

2021 to 45 per cent of GDP in 2022, along with improvement in the current account balance to a

surplus of 6.8 per cent of GDP in 2022, buoyed by higher oil prices and supported by the prudent fiscal measures adopted by the government to reduce spending and strengthen non-oil revenues.

Furthermore, the IMF stressed that despite the global geopolitical, economic and health challenges, it is possible to achieve higher oil revenues and accelerate the implementation of structural reforms in line with Oman Vision 2040.

In a final note, the concluding statement commended Oman's cooperation and efforts towards achieving the visit's objectives and the government's commitment and drive towards economic recovery.

Alizz Islamic Bank expresses appreciation for trust of customers and shareholders

MUSCAT: Sulaiman al Harthi (pictured), Chief Executive Officer of Alizz Islamic Bank, expressed his appreciation for the trust of the bank's customers and shareholders in its Sharia-compliant banking services and products, given the impact of such trust on the bank's success in strengthening its financial position and achieving continuous growth in its financial results and figures during Q1 of 2022.

He explained that any success made by the bank is reflected in the performance of the group, Oman Arab Bank and Ominvest, adding that the bank wouldn't be able to achieve such success without the board's prudent approach and support.

Meanwhile, he affirmed that the bank is determined to move forward to realise sustainable results for shareholders in line with the prudent strategy developed by the board of directors, and in light of the positive indicators of economic recovery.

Al Harthi thanked the bank staff for



their dedication, high performance and commitment to fulfil their duties and meet customers' expectations.

The bank proceeded to expand its services and products by targeting different segments of the society through organising various events, marketing campaigns, symposiums and lectures across different

wilayats and governorates of the Sultanate of Oman in order to identify the community needs in the field of Islamic banking and explain complicated issues in this sector. As a result, demand increased on the sector, its financial results became significant, and its customer base grew significantly.

Alizz Islamic Bank's customer base increased by 75% due to such efforts in line with the bank's commitment to support growth and prosperity of our communities.

Moreover, the bank directed its investments to existing digital platforms and entered into partnerships aiming to offer fin-tech-based solutions.

It is committed to promoting the innovation culture and seeks to improve its basic capabilities. The bank is working on developing a digital business model to keep up with customers' changing needs and technological advance, which is reflected in the bank's ability to meet its customers' needs and streamline transactions.

In a step reflecting such success, Capital Intelligence has affirmed Alizz Islamic Bank's Long- and Short-Term ratings on the Oman National Scale at 'omAA' and 'omA1+', respectively with stable outlook which was improved during the year as a result of change in outlook of Oman Sovereign rating and strengthening of the bank's financial position.

The bank is committed to providing financing offers in line with the incomes of individuals and companies; e.g. during Q1 of 2022, it launched a varied package of offers to promote customer experience in the Islamic banking sector and provide them with customised choices, such as purchasing and building the suitable house in line with the source of monthly income, in addition to exclusive offers for purchase of vehicles or funding commodity, including electronics, furniture, etc, along with various options in terms of finance periods, payment and at low rates.

Get your free credit card with BankDhofar

MUSCAT: BankDhofar announced the launch of a new offer campaign for its credit cards, where customers will be able to get their credit card with free annual fee for their first year and they also can earn rewards points as a bonus point along with other attractive benefits. The offer is valid through September 5, 2022.

Commenting on the offer, Yousuf bin Ahmed al Balushi (pictured), Head of Payment Hub at BankDhofar said: "BankDhofar strives to offer a broad range of best-in-class services and state-of-the-art products. This promotion, allows our customers applying for the card during the offer period to enjoy the exclusive benefits with no annual fees for the first year."

This offer adds to the wide array of exclusive services and special offers available to BankDhofar customers. Customers applying for a credit card during the period of the campaign will get the chance to earn up to 2,000 joining rewards points from BankDhofar Rewards Program.

With the Rewards Program, customers can earn points when they use their credit cards. These points can then be redeemed,



allowing customers to choose from more than 300 airlines and destinations worldwide. They also have the choice of over 180,000 hotels across the globe to use the points.

Moreover, the rewards programme allows customers to redeem points at various shopping outlets, restaurants and cafes. Customers may view their points through BankDhofar's Mobile Banking App, or they may visit the website to redeem their points.

Additionally, BankDhofar customers may transfer money from their Credit Card account to their operative account (current/savings) in few easy steps through the Mobile Banking App, which is an exclusive feature with BankDhofar.

Toyota Yaris: Perfect companion for exciting journeys

MUSCAT: Toyota Yaris is a fun-to-drive vehicle that offers customers maximum excitement on every journey. Packed with power, comfort, fuel-efficiency and more, the Yaris scores well on all fronts in the mid-size sedan and hatchback category.

The Yaris sedan and hatchback powers journeys with a 1.5L engine that churns out a maximum output of 106 hp and 14.3 kg-m of torque. This is paired to the CVT transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with excellent fuel efficiency.

Cutting-edge design defines the exterior of the Yaris, with its dynamic angles as well as sleek headlamps and clearance lamps.

The front of the Yaris has a horizontal grille for a wider yet more aerodynamic appearance, while rear combination taillights adorn the rear of the car with a unique look.

With an exciting interior featuring a distinctive design, and offering convenience and comfort with a layer of luxury, the Yaris sedan's cabin has an exclusive profile.

The centre console of the Yaris has been designed to create a greater sense of integration. The cabin has been adorned with a range of enhanced features,



including keyless entry, cruise control, as well as a four-speaker audio system with AUX and USB.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Yaris sedan, which includes a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants, such as driver and front passenger airbags, vehicle stability control (VSC), anti-lock braking system (ABS), electronic brake force distribution (EBD), brake assist (BA), traction control (TRC), among many others.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate

applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories.

Pictures and colour shown may differ from actual specifications. For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota showroom.

Omantel webinar to focus on 5G and Industry 4.0



MUSCAT: Omantel will host on June 22 its fourth webinar under the theme "5G and 4iR". The webinar aims at introducing 5G technology, its potentials, and its impacts on the telecom sector and consumers.

Omantel, the first to introduce 5G technology in the Sultanate of Oman, is hosting a series of 5 webinars to focus on this frontier digital technology and the benefit it will bring to individuals and corporates. The first webinar, "5G Beyond Speed", was held on November 23, 2021.

The second webinar was held on March 9, 2022 under the topic "5G...Unlocking new potentials" and the 3rd webinar was held on May 25th.

The interaction with the three webinars has been overwhelming and witnessed the participation of a large number of IT&C official at public and private organizations, academicians, journalists and digital media influencers.

The 4th webinar will host speakers who will share their ideas, strategies and experience about the latest developments provided by 5G. Dr Yousuf al Hinai, GM of ICT at Omantel Enterprise BU, will be speaking on the use of 5G and 4iR in the Educational sector, while Dr Haytham al Hajri, expert in Cybersecurity, will focus on how the 5G will enhance the role of Cybersecurity.

Bank Muscat to continue special financing offer till June 30

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced that customers can take maximum advantage of its discounted financing offers on home and personal financing till June 30, 2022.

The bank is at present offering highly-competitive interest rates starting at 4.5 per cent for Baituna Home Finance and 4.75 per cent on Personal Financing to employees of government and semi-government institutions as well as some Tier 1 companies. Customers can also enjoy lower interest rates on short-term personal financing that starts at just 4 per cent.

The special offer is in line with the bank's strategy of enhancing financial inclusion in the Sultanate of Oman and developing various products and services that address

the needs of different customer segments. It is aimed at those who are currently not availing any financing from the bank. New customers can also avail the attractive offer by applying for financing or transferring their existing financing to Bank Muscat.

Customers can get Baituna financing up to RO 500,000 for up to 25 years to construct or purchase new homes or buy land for residential construction. Bank Muscat customers can take advantage of the fast processing of applications and the excellent insurance coverage for their financing.

Flexible payment options and quick documentation makes Baituna the leading home finance in the Sultanate of Oman. Documents required include ID card, Salary assignment letter, Krooki and



Mulkiya copy, valuation of property from an approved evaluator, Sales and Purchase agreement, and seller ID.

Construction legalisation (Ebahaa) and maps as well as Advisory letter and

contractor agreement are required in case of construction loans. To apply for Baituna home finance, customer may visit the bank's Baituna sales centres in Qurum, Maabelah, Barka, Suhar, Saham, Sur, Ibra, Nizwa, Ibri, Buraimi and Salalah or any Bank Muscat branch across different governorates in Oman.

To apply for personal finance, customers may visit their nearest Bank Muscat branch with the required documents including a salary transfer letter from their employer and their ID cards, which will ensure speedy processing of their applications.

Financing up to RO 200,000 is available to customers based on fulfilment of the eligibility criteria.

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman for the

last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFM. Its range of digital banking channels including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking are helping customers meet the vast majority of their financial needs 24/7.

The bank offers various financing options aligned to customer needs and its aim of facilitating a high standard of living for people in Oman.

Customers can use the loan calculator available at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx> to view details of the financing options available to them. For general information on financing options, please refer to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/default.aspx> or call 24795555.



Al Mouj Muscat supports local talent development

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Since its inception, Al Mouj Muscat has generated 2,200 permanent jobs and through its Al Mouj Muscat Impact campaign has shown how talented Omanis and women are integral to the success of the Integrated Tourism Complex's (ITC) diverse workforce, with its sustainable approach to job creation and training set to have a major impact on the future generation of business leaders in the country.

Al Mouj Muscat is a partnership between Majid Al Futtaim, Omran and Tanmia and in line with the targets as set out in Oman's 2040 Vision. The leading lifestyle destination also draws on knowledge-sharing and skills development from

Majid Al Futtaim's expertise in retail, leisure, hospitality, and communities. As well as a joint venture partner at Al Mouj, the UAE-based organisation has invested in Oman since 2001 and is committed to contributing to the development of the Sultanate's economy, people and culture.

Al Mouj Muscat is committed to boosting employment opportunities as well as furthering the objectives of Omanisation.

Currently 71 per cent of the lifestyle and leisure destination employees are Omani, a much higher figure than the 45 per cent goal mandated by the government to the real estate sector. In addition, 40 per cent of its senior roles are held by women.

Developing employment opportunities and enhancing the breadth and depth of Omani talent has been a key objective since Al



Mouj Muscat was established in 2006. To date, it has created 2,200 permanent jobs, a figure which will rise to an expected 5,500 permanent roles following project

completion.

As well as long-term employment, Oman's leading ITC is highly focused on providing rewarding career paths.

The nurturing of individuals through development and training is central to Al Mouj Muscat's approach which includes company-wide training programmes and internships for nationals with linked tangible targets.

With processes in place to develop their abilities and further careers, Al Mouj Muscat's Head of Customer Experience, Harwa al Lawati believes that Al Mouj is cultivating tomorrow's leaders for the benefit of the nation.

"Al Mouj Muscat provides every opportunity to build skills and capabilities that will serve both individuals and organisations over the long-term.

I have experienced for myself that it believes in and invests in Omani talent, and, as one of the 40 per cent of women who hold leadership positions, I'm proud to

serve a company that is dedicated to creating a positive impact for people, community and our country."

Al Mouj Muscat's CEO, Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani added: "Al Mouj Muscat is committed to our national interests at every level. We have incredibly talented individuals working across highly diverse roles and our management systems support us to measure and improve performance.

"It is a holistic way of creating efficiencies and opportunities to advance that will ensure a continuous pipeline of exceptional talent and which will have an impact far beyond our own organisation. We can be confident this generation will go on to use their impressive skills to lead organisations and ensure a bright and prosperous future for our nation".

OQ signs pact to fund solar panel installations at Al Buraimi wells

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 19

OQ has announced the signing of an agreement with the office of the Wali of Al Buraimi towards construction of auxiliary wells in Falaj Al Buraimi and Sa'ara within the Wilayat.

Present at the signing ceremony were Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Al Buraimi, Omar bin Mohammed al Abri, Acting Head of the Foreign Affairs and Social Investment Unit in OQ, and other senior officials from the General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources, and the General Directorate of Health Affairs.

The agreement will see the installation of solar panels to operate water pumps as an alternative to conventional electric energy, thus ensuring the principle of project sustainability.

The Wali of Al Buraimi appreciated OQ's support in enhancing the auxiliary wells at Falaj Al Buraimi and Sa'ara.



THE AGREEMENT WILL SEE THE INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS TO OPERATE WATER PUMPS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CONVENTIONAL ELECTRIC ENERGY, THUS ENSURING THE PRINCIPLE OF PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY.

He added that OQ has worked relentlessly in supporting community initiatives aimed at enhancing social and economic factors within the region. He

emphasised on the importance of sustainability within agriculture which will in turn benefit the citizen residing in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi.

'Businesses and companies must be environmentally conscious'

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 19

A seminar on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) was held at the Crowne Plaza Muscat on Thursday under the auspices of Dr Nasser al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy. Following opening remarks by Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner of Crowe Oman, discussions on the seminar theme were initiated by Karl Jackson, Audit and Assurance Partner at Crowe.

Speaking during the technical session, Luis Piacenza, Head of ESG Practice at Crowe Global and Partner - Crowe Spain, said: "Nowadays, everyone wants to talk about ESG, and executives compel their teams to start the path to ESGisation.

The primary imperative is to mitigate the significant risks related to climate change, erosion of social cohesion, by having good corporate governance.



He further added: "We also need to define what ESG means to the financial sector. In a nutshell, the financial industry needs to ensure that the capital is available for financing the transition and adaptation to the new global imperatives. For corporates, sustainability is the formula to hear the markets, not only the clients but also stakeholders."

Varghese Kallukaran, Senior Manager Advisory at Crowe UAE, stated: "There is a ripple effect that is created from the prevalence and institutionalisation of sustainability reporting among

large corporations. They increasingly require ESG data and disclosures from the thousands of smaller, often privately held companies in their supply chains.

Gaining your stakeholders confidence by demonstrating your organisations approach to addressing sustainability related challenges and opportunities sends the right message."

The seminar was attended by delegates from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, banking institutions and large corporates.

Is Islamic banking any different from conventional finance?



DR NAGIB A OMAR

The common practices of Islamic finance and banking came into existence along with the foundation of Islam.

However, the establishment of formal Islamic finance occurred only in the 20th century and ever since, the recent statistics show that Islamic Finance sector continues to grow exponentially at 15-25 per cent per year, while Islamic financial institutions oversee over \$2 trillion.

With such growth, many are asking whether Islamic Banking and Finance is really a viable alternative to the traditional

interest-based (conventional) banking and whether it is sustainable for all parties involved in these Islamic ways (contracts) of doing trade or banking, not only for Muslims but humanity at large.

Indeed, most participants in the global financial markets have realised that most financial institutions were affected by the global financial crunch, except for the Islamic financial institutions that specifically carried out non-speculative and ethical forms of financing.

It is therefore imperative to understand that Islamic finance places emphasis on asset-based or equity-based financing.

For any form of financing, there has to be an underlying asset to back the facility approved as Shari'ah-based product. It is also good to note that when we look at banking operations, it is all debt, equity, trade or lease-based.

Thus, the Islamic way of equity-based financing has created no

room for speculation hence created not only a positive impact on the profitability of a business but also improving the welfare of the society, as compared to the negative effects evident through interest-based products.

Many scholars in the field of Islamic finance and banking have always tried to demystify the concept of Islamic finance and tried to show the key differences to conventional

banking, which comes down to the basic understanding of the "banking process" that distinguishes a bank as "Shari'ah-compliant" compared to the traditional conventional banking. Islamic finance is a type of financing activity that must comply with Shari'ah (Islamic Law).

The concept can also refer to the investments that are permissible under Shari'ah. On

the other hand, an Islamic bank is a financial intermediary or institution that brings together two parties namely, the providers and the users of capital, in accordance with the principles of the Shari'ah.

Thus, some of the banking practices and principles that are used in conventional finance are not permissible under the Shari'ah laws.

Contemporary Islamic finance is based on a number of prohibitions that are not always illegal in the countries where Islamic financial institutions are operating such as (1) charging interest on loans or paying interest on deposits, (2) prohibition of speculation (maysir), (3) participating in contracts with excessive risks and uncertainty (gharar) and (4) investing or engaging in business that are considered haram or forbidden in Islam, such as producing and selling alcohol or pork. Islamic finance is also based on

two other crucial principles.

One is that the "material finality" or the "subject matter" of any transaction must be based to a real underlying asset for it to be permissible; and secondly, the aspect of profit or loss sharing where, parties entering into the contracts in Islamic finance share profit or loss and the risks associated with any transaction. It should be noted that no one should benefit from the transaction more than the other party.

Shari'ah financial institutions are thus unique in their core activities that are regulated by rules derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah (Prophetic practices) and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) rulings.

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Germany plans further measures to reduce gas consumption

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck is planning additional measures to reduce gas consumption and replace supplies in view of lower gas deliveries from Russia.

The use of gas for power generation and industry is to be reduced and the filling of storage facilities is to be prioritised ahead of the winter.

The government is providing billions in funds to finance the measures.

In addition, Habeck — a Green member of Germany's centre-left coalition government — said that more coal-fired power plants are to be used to make up the shortfall.

In a five-page paper, Habeck says that “gas consumption must continue to fall, and more gas must go into the storage facilities, otherwise it will be really tight in winter.”

Habeck has also floated steps to reduce private energy consumption, such as a cap on domestic heating. But Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he was against discussing “individual measures” without having an overall plan in place.

Russia's state-owned energy firm Gazprom has significantly reduced the flow of gas through the Nord Stream 1 Baltic Sea pipeline in recent days, justifying it by saying there had been delays in the repair of compressor turbines by the company Siemens Energy.

Habeck has said the move was politically motivated. The missing parts can still be replaced, and gas storage facilities were still being filled albeit at higher prices, he said.

The government plans an additional credit line of \$15.7 billion via the state bank KfW.

Habeck is also planning to introduce a gas auction model this summer. This is to offer incentives to industrial gas consumers to save gas. In essence, the idea is that industrial customers who can do without gas will reduce their consumption in exchange for financial compensation, and make the gas available for storage.

Meanwhile, the opposition Free Democrats (FDP) called for Germany to revisit its ban on fracking — a controversial process by which oil and gas is extracted from shale rock using chemicals and pressure. “As scientific studies show, under modern security standards fracking causes no relevant environmental damage,” the FDP's parliamentary director Torsten Herbst said. — dpa

The use of gas for power generation and industry is to be reduced and the filling of storage facilities is to be prioritised ahead of the winter.



PRICE GROWTH IN IRAN

Iranians buy fresh produce at the Tajrish Bazaar market in the capital Tehran. Iran has been wrestling with rampant price growth for years, exceeding 30 per cent annually every year since 2018, according to the International Monetary Fund. — AFP

Let's count what really matters



JAYATI GHOSH

The author, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism.

GOVERNMENTS SEEK TO PROMOTE GDP GROWTH THROUGH ALL POSSIBLE MEANS, OFTEN REGARDLESS OF THE WIDER CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PLANET AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF REWARDS.

Despite the well-known problems with using gross domestic product as an indicator of human development, policymakers around the world still seem to be obsessed with it.

Governments seek to promote GDP growth through all possible means, often regardless of the wider consequences for the planet and the distribution of rewards.

The current focus on quarterly growth reflects a particularly unhealthy short-term perspective.

And yet the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral organisations refer to GDP in all assessments of economic performance and make it the sole focus of their forecasts.

But the concept of GDP is deeply flawed. Aggregate or per capita figures are obviously blind to the distribution of income, and GDP is increasingly unable to measure either quality of life or the sustainability of any particular system of production, distribution, and consumption.

Moreover, because GDP in most countries captures only market transactions, it excludes a significant amount of goods and services produced for personal or household consumption.

By making market pricing the chief determinant of value, irrespective of any activity's social value, GDP massively undervalues what many now recognise (especially in light of the Covid-19

pandemic) as essential services relating to the care economy.

GDP correspondingly overvalues activities, goods, and services that are priced higher because of the oligopolistic structure of markets – financial services being a particularly telling example.

The obsession with economic growth, independent of other indicators of well-being, leads to problematic assessments of the actual performance of economies and to poor policy decisions and outcomes.

That is why there is now much more discussion within the United Nations and its Statistical Commission about moving beyond GDP.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has repeatedly stressed that GDP is no longer the correct way to measure “richness,” and argues that it is “time to collectively commit to complementary measurements.”

This challenge was taken up by the UN's High-Level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs (I am a member), which recently issued a compendium that considers six big questions relevant to achieving a just and sustainable recovery.

One important recommendation involves suggesting alternatives to GDP that national policymakers and international organisations should track on a regular basis.

The idea is to provide a dashboard that captures some of the key socioeconomic variables that policymakers should monitor and that should be used to judge their

performance.

What are these alternative measures? One is a labour-market indicator: the median wage multiplied by the employment rate.

The median wage is a better indicator of the conditions faced by most workers than the average (mean) wage, which can be overly influenced by high remuneration at the top.

And the employment rate is a useful indicator not only of the state of demand in the labour market, but also of the extent of unpaid labour typically performed mostly by women (since the greater their involvement in such work, the less likely they are to be able to engage in paid employment).

In the United States and the United Kingdom, for example, my estimates suggest that per capita GDP dramatically outperformed the labour-market indicator in the period from 2009 to 2020, with a widening gap between the two.

In India, the two measures actually moved in different directions, with the labour-market indicator declining even as per capita GDP increased.

Another alternative metric is the proportion of the population that can afford a nutritious diet (according to the Food and Agriculture Organization's definition).

This indicator is likely to become even more important as the global food crisis worsens, and it does not necessarily move in line with income poverty.

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Central banks walk inflation-recession tightrope

ERWAN LUCAS

Central banks have ramped up their battle against runaway inflation, a necessary remedy that could have the adverse side effect of tipping countries into recession, analysts say.

Just this past week, the US Federal Reserve announced its biggest interest rate hike in almost 30 years, followed by the fifth straight increase by the Bank of England and the first in 15 years in Switzerland. “This week was a first. The craziest in my experience,” said Frederick Ducrozet, chief economist at Pictet Wealth Management.

The moves rattled stock markets as investors fear that while the rate increases are needed, they could put the brakes on

economic growth if the tightening of monetary policy becomes too aggressive.

“Recessions are increasingly likely as central banks race to dramatically raise rates before inflation spirals out of control,” said Craig Erlam, an analyst at online trading platform OANDA.

Capital Economics, a research group, said it does not anticipate a recession in the United States. “But the Fed is deliberately tempering demand in order to reduce price pressures. This is a difficult line to tread and there is clearly a risk that it goes too far and the economy tips into recession,” it said in a note.

Emerging countries could be collateral victims from rate hikes. The dollar rises when the US Fed raises its rates.

“A strong dollar will complicate (debt repayments) of countries with deficits, which borrow often in that currency,”

Ducrozet said.

Central banks had insisted last year that inflation was only “transitory” as prices were driven up by bottlenecks in supply chains after governments emerged from lockdowns.

But energy and food prices have soared in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, pushing inflation higher and prompting economists to lower the world's growth prospects for this year.

This has left central banks with no other choice but to move more aggressively than planned.

Australia's central bank raised rates more than expected earlier this month while Brazil last week lifted its benchmark rate for the 11th straight time. More hikes are looming in the United States and Europe.

But it is the Swiss National Bank that

caused the biggest shock on Thursday when it announced a rate increase of 0.5 percentage points, the first since 2007.

The SNB had focused on keeping the Swiss franc from being too strong until now. “The actions of the SNB are notable in that they mark a significant shift in policy (away) from a very dovish position,” said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK.

The European Central Bank has been slower to act than its peers. It is putting an end to its massive bond-buying scheme and will finally raise rates next month for the first time in a decade.

The eurozone faces another problem: The yields paid by its governments to borrow money have surged, with indebted countries such as Italy being charged a premium compared to Germany, a safer bet for investors.

This “spread” revived memories of the eurozone's debt crisis, prompting the ECB to hold an emergency meeting on Thursday after which it said it would design a tool to prevent further stress in the bond market.

The Bank of Japan bucked the global trend on Friday as it stood by its decision not to raise its rate, sending the yen close to the lowest level against the dollar since 1998.

But even the Bank of Japan could adjust its policy, said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management.

“BoJ members are considering public dissatisfaction with inflation and the rapid depreciation of the yen,” Innes said.

“While they plan to maintain the current easing policy, they may look to make some tweaks to support the currency,” he said. — AFP

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Back to tabletop games

In recent years, Oman has developed a bit of a tabletop community of its own. Tabletop Games Oman founded in 2016 by Abdul-haseeb al Yaqoubi, who had picked up an interest in the card game, Magic: The Gathering while he was in the UK has been picked up by more Omanis, creating a much more stable player base and finally allowing it to really start to grow and spread in this region... **P20**

Towards a green community

By Kabeer Yousuf

CERTAINLY, IT MIGHT not be a wonder to see various fruits and vegetables grow amid the rugged terrain of the Sultanate of Oman but such initiatives, to convert the mountains into vast vegetation, are quite less.

Notwithstanding the fact that there have been many such initiatives around, a global community with strong, proactive presence in Oman is making headway supporting national initiatives in converting the arid mountainous region

into a green haven.

The Dawoodi Bohra community in Oman has initiated a 'Green Project' by planting saplings in and around their community centre in Darsait, in commemoration of World Environment Day which falls on June 5 every year.

The community has set up a vegetable garden aiming at adopting a more sustainable approach to their food requirements.

This programme is part of the Dawoodi Bohras' global Project Rise initiative, which works in partnership with local authorities and organisations to



preserve and protect the environment, fight against hunger and malnutrition around the world, provide access to education and undertake health and hygiene programmes.

"Our Project 'Rise' initiative is an earnest attempt to keep pace with the global development challenges, ranging from hunger and poverty to climate crisis and education, which cannot be addressed in isolation. Collective and collaborative efforts, however smaller

in nature, are required to ensure improved socio-economic conditions for children and families the world over," said a spokesperson from the Bohra community in Muscat.

With this objective in mind, saplings of a wide variety of fruits and vegetables and flowers, besides dates, lemon, pomegranate, drumstick, papaya, tomato, eggplant, lady fingers, potato, chilli, radish, carrot, lettuce, beans, cabbage, basil, mint, coriander, ornamental flow-

ers including bougainvillea are planted as part of the first phase of the programme.

"Natural compost fertilisers will be used and the fruits and vegetables grown in this garden will be used in the preparation of food supplied to community members and public. We aim to recycle and reuse green wastes generated from the kitchen and elsewhere."

"Furthermore we are will instill awareness on benefits of gardening and plantation, and to set a platform for those who want to learn farming," the spokesperson said.

An array of activities as part of the Phase 1 is currently being carried out starting today. Soil improvement, removal of infertile soil and weeds, preparing sweet soil and mixing manure, preparing fertilisers are happening side by side while landscaping, fencing around the plot, raising the beds, trellis and supports, walkways, irrigation tank and watering setup, plantation, seeds and saplings, watering and setting up compost pits, and logistics to collect green waste from kitchen are currently being organised.

Efforts are on to channel waste water from the community kitchen to make it reusable for plantation. Additionally, waste water recycling, and grey water reusing are currently in planning as part of the phase 3, which would commence later this year.

READ

TRAPPED IN A VIDEO GAME

BY DUSTIN BRADY

After getting sucked into the new game Full Blast with his best friend Eric, Jesse quickly discovers that he's being followed by a mysterious figure. If he doesn't figure out what's going on fast, he'll be trapped for good!



ENTERTAINMENT

Music superstar Beyonce revealed the title of what appears to be her first solo album in six years, "Renaissance", following on the critically-acclaimed "Lemonade." — Reuters



FASHION TRENDS

A live show by Christian Dior in the Spanish city of Seville on Thursday included a colourful celebration of flamenco. — Reuters





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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

New Spider-Verse film 'tests limits of animation'



WITH MORE THAN 240 characters across six dimensions, the makers of "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" are pushing animation and storytelling to their limits with the follow-up to their Oscar-winning hit.

Early, unfinished images of the sequel — one of the most anticipated of 2023 — received a standing ovation at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival in France on Tuesday.

It once again centres on New York teenager Miles Morales, who is just one of several different forms of spider superhero spread across parallel dimensions.

Like the first installment, 2019's "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse", it is set to be a demonstration of technical wizardry, with different visual styles used for each of the universes the superhero visits.

Among the scenes unveiled on Tuesday was a wildly impressive fight with a vulture in New York's Guggenheim Museum, with a heavily pregnant Spider-woman crashing into the scene on a motorcycle.

Morales "has always been the core of it. But we didn't want to rest on our laurels and take the easy path," Kemp Powers, one of the film's three directors, told AFP. The team feels the weight of expectation this time around.

The first film was a sleeper hit, gradually building up steam thanks to strong reviews and audience reactions — ultimately winning the best animation Oscar.

"It's very ambitious — the idea was to push ourselves creatively and test the limits of what technology can do," said co-director Joachim dos Santos, while promising that the plot would still be comprehensible to everyone from "babies to grandparents".

Wonderful medium

The team is having particular fun creating new villain The Spot, to be voiced by Jason Schwartzman, whose body is a series of holes that look like a shape-shifting, unfinished drawing.

"Animation is a wonderful medium because there's things you can only do with animation," co-director Justin Thompson told AFP.

"You couldn't imagine any live action medium being able to replicate what we're doing right now with The Spot in terms of his appearance, his movement, his interaction with multiple people at the same time... it would look so cheesy in live action, but it actually looks fluid in animation."

While the directors enjoy escaping the limits of reality — "none of the film is bound by physics or gravity," said Powers — there are some unavoidable constraints.

"We take five or six years per film. We have large crews but no one can imagine how much time it takes to make only a few seconds," he said.

"While our imagination has no limits — time is a limit."

The film is due for worldwide release in June 2023 and a third installment is planned for the following year.

The creators are determined that both get a full theatrical release, especially after Powers had to see his previous film, Pixar's "Soul", go straight to streaming because of the pandemic.

"We make these for the big screen, and these will be on the big screen, barring an alien invasion or a world war!" he said. — AFP

CHANGING WORLD

The battle to build a child-friendly metaverse



AS A YOUNG woman straps on her vest and headset and becomes immersed in a virtual world, Mainak Chaudhuri talks excitedly about the potential of the technology.

"This is the first step towards the metaverse," Chaudhuri of French start-up Actronika said at this week's VivaTech trade show in Paris.

The vest can give users the sensation of being buffeted by the wind or even feel a monster's breath on their back, and it can be used to enhance movie watching, education or gaming.

It is a family-friendly vision of the 3D immersive internet, now widely known as the metaverse, and sits well with some interactive experiences already widely available for children — like virtual trips to museums.

But campaigners and experts are increasingly warning that the wider ecosystem needs to start acting on child safety to ensure the benign vision is realised.

"The biggest challenge is kids are getting exposed to content that is not intended for them," said Kavya Pearlman, whose NGO XR Safety Initiative campaigns to ensure immersive technology will be safe for everyone.

The problems she envisages range from children being exposed to sexual and violent material, to worries over young people being used as content creators or having inappropriate contact with adults.

Even though the metaverse has not yet been widely adopted and the technology is still in development, early users have already brought to light serious issues.

One woman's allegation that her avatar was sexually assaulted in the metaverse sparked global outrage.

Worries about the future of the technology have only grown as the economic opportunities have become clearer.

COLOSSAL MONEY

Metaverse-linked investments topped \$50 billion last year, according to research firm McKinsey, which predicts the figure could more than double this year.

"We're talking about absolutely colossal amounts of money, that's three times more than the investment in artificial intelligence in 2017," McKinsey partner Eric Hazan told.

Chief among the investors is tech giant Meta, which owns the likes of Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp.

The firm has already rolled out measures to give parents more control over the content their children interact with while using VR headsets.

Meta and many of its competitors market immersive products with a lower age limit of 13 — though it is widely accepted that younger children will use the tech.

Pearlman raises a broader concern that very little is known about the possible effects on young people's development.

"Organisations have not yet validated these experiences from a scientific perspective," she said.

"Yet they are allowing kids to be exposed to these new technologies, practically experimenting on children's developing brains."

The metaverse has shifted the paradigm, according to Valentino Megale, a neuropsychologist who researches the issue.

While the public has so far merely consumed what others have created, in the metaverse "we are going to be part of the

digital content", he said.

"This makes everything that we experience in that world more compelling," he told the RightsCon digital rights conference last week, adding that it was particularly true for children.

Experts worry that the industry needs scrutiny before the rot sets in.

ETHICAL BASIS

The solution, they argue, is to make sure the builders of these new virtual worlds instil child protection measures into the ethos of their work.

In other words, each piece of software and hardware should be constructed on the understanding that children might use it and will need safeguarding.

"We are potentially going to have a huge impact on their behaviour, their identity, their emotions, their psychology in the exact moment when they are forming their personality," said Megale.

"You need to provide an ethical basis and safety by design from the beginning."

One of the most controversial areas of product design is the kind of suit that will allow users to feel all sorts of sensations — even pain.

Such suits are already being manufactured, simulating pain through electric shocks.

The products are intended for military or other professional training.

Chaudhuri said the products developed by his firm Actronika use vibrations rather than electric shocks and were perfectly safe for anyone to use.

"We're about engaging the audience and not necessarily doing a real-time firefighting scenario or a battlefield scenario," he said.

"We don't cause pain." — AFP

OF BOOKS, LIFE, AND POP CULTURE



Rasha al Raisi

Rescues in Kitzania

LAST RAMADHAN, we had an unusual type of rescues in Kitzania: birds.

The first rescue happened on the third day of Ramadhan. It was 2.30 am and I was up having my early breakfast when I heard a squawk outside the window. It was a weird time for birds to be flying let alone squawking, so I dismissed it thinking that it must've been one of those migrant birds being dazed as usual. But when Sinan climbed the sofa and started staring down the window, it confirmed my doubts that there was a bird somewhere on Kitzania grounds.

I ran outside to where the window overlooked and found a scene out of a Hollywood horror movie. My cats were forming a semicircle, squatting and staring at the corner. It was dark — I didn't get the chance to switch on the outside lights — and all I could hear were wings fluttering and a loud screech this time. I was definitely dealing with a bird but all I could see was his shadow. Luckily, Sham was up having his early breakfast too, so I called him loudly and asked him to bring his mobile for light.

Sham came out immediately and once he shone the blinding light of his mobile to the corner, I could see a terrified young parrot who wasn't able to fly.

I asked Sham to guard him while I went indoors to bring a cat carrier to put him inside. Once the bird was in, Sham insisted on keeping him for the night and feeding him bananas. Obviously, the Kitzanians weren't happy with my interference and shot me dirty looks that I ignored.

The next morning, I bought the parrot a proper cage as I wasn't sure how long he'd be staying with us due to his injury. Luckily, the vet declared that there were no wounds. The poor bird was in shock and

pain from being yanked down while sleeping on the tree. It would be just a matter of days for him to recover and be able to fly again.

On the second day, two of his mates came looking for him. They were screeching deafeningly and managed to find him in the balcony where we'd put him. I was worried that he wasn't fully recovered and his flight would be compromised, so I devised a plan for his release. I asked Sham to stand in the garden while I opened the cage. I didn't want him to fall and get caught by the cats again. Amazingly enough, the minute I opened the cage he spread his wings and flew away, joining his two mates. Within weeks of this incident, we had another baby sparrow falling from the top of a tree.

Fortunately, I was passing by and saved him from being attacked by one of the new kittens. I took him indoors with me, not really sure what to do with him. Mom suggested to leave him in the balcony so that his parents would come and pick him up. I closed the balcony door to stop my cats from entering and watched for a while.

The first thing that the baby bird did was clean himself from my scent before starting to chirp loudly. Within minutes, two adult birds landed on the tree opposite of the balcony and were chirping back. They were obviously planning how to move him to the nest again. Unfortunately, I had to leave and when I came back the baby sparrow was gone. Next week, I'll talk about the cat rescues that came right after these episodes. Stay tuned!

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: The World According to Bahja. rasha.books@yahoo.com



art & life

Local Scene

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MONDAY | JUNE 20 | 2022

Back to tabletop games

By Mazid Akaak

For as long as civilisation has existed, human ingenuity has brought about innovative and creative ways for people to have fun. Long before the inventions of Monopoly or The Game of Life, cultures from across the world and across ages, have been found to have different manner of board games.

The history of tabletop games is long and rich, and the presence of board games is a seemingly shared characteristics of most of the oldest civilisations. Ancient Egypt had games such as Semet, Mehen and Nine Men's Morris, with the prior two estimated to date back to 3100 BC. Mesopotamia had a board game known as The Royal Game of Ur thought to be from about 2500 BC. Tabletop games, and references to them, have been discovered in Mesoamerica, Scandinavia, China, the British Isles, the Middle East, Russia and the list goes on and on. One of the oldest discovered board games has even been found in Oman, dating back around 4000 years.

Even today, despite the rapid development and availability of modern technology, the popularity of tabletop games persists. Now, there are many different types of tabletop games. Aside from the classic board game and the hyper-commercial ones such as Monopoly or Uno, there are genres like miniature games, card games and role-playing games.

Miniature games, particularly miniature wargames, are a popular genre centrally themed around the idea of players commanding forces of miniatures, most commonly in open combat against one another. A big draw to miniature games is the collecting, assembly and painting of miniatures, which to many, is a hobby in itself.

Card games are quite self-explanatory. They are games typically consist of nothing more than a deck of cards, and a set of rules, though they may at times require other components, such as dice. They are very portable and convenient, and despite their simple nature, card games can be highly challenging, strategic and competitive.

Role playing games are, in their simplest form, games which require nothing more than paper, pencils, dice and a strong imagination. In these games, the players typically play as a band of adventurers

questing through a story shaped by the decisions they make. One player of the group will take the role of Game Master. A Game Master is the story teller. They control non-playable characters, describe things to the players and guide players through the game. The original and most popular role playing game is Dungeons and Dragons.

In recent years, Oman has developed a bit of a tabletop community of its own, one of which started to properly get off the ground in 2016.

The community, called Tabletop Games Oman was founded by Abdul-haseeb al Yaqoubi, who had picked up an interest in the card game, Magic: The Gathering, while he was in the UK for university.

"One of the things that kept me going was the community. Everyone was like-minded, and it was a way for me to make friends", he shared.

When he returned to Oman, he discovered that there was no such community.

"My father told me, 'If it's all about the community, then why don't you start your own here?'"

Given this inspiration, he did just that. Initially, the community started with only three people. With perseverance, however, it slowly grew, gaining new members, generating interest in tabletop games, and having new subgroups for different types of games such as card games, role-playing games, miniature games and board games.

Ali Derweesh, a member of the miniature wargaming sub community, shared that when he first actively got into the hobby 12 years ago, "locally, a tabletop gaming scene was non-existent", and that, as a result, "games were few and far between."

Despite this, he maintained a great interest in the hobby.

"I was still able to enjoy the artistic side of the hobby. What's more, I felt a part of the online community, showing off my painted models, getting art advice and discussing new tactics and releases. It wasn't the same as enjoying the hobby with others in person, but I still felt connected and engaged", he said.

Something which appeals to Ali about miniature games is the hobby element. He enjoys to collect, paint and modify miniatures.

"The hobby is very multi-faceted, so there are a lot of different elements to enjoy. I like the creative and artistic aspects of not only painting your models but also modifying them to be unique, the puzzles

presented in gameplay, even the engaging narrative that evolves on the table as armies clash and heroes battle. Most importantly, in this day and age, this is an escape from the screens that consume so much of our lives, it's something to do with my hands, rather than a keyboard and mouse, and a highly entertaining social activity that's great for connecting with like-minded individuals and making new friends."

"In the last few years, the hobby has been picked up by more Omanis, creating a much more stable player base and finally allowing it to really start to grow and spread in this region", he added.

Although it is gradually growing and gaining acceptance, the tabletop community still faces certain challenges.

"The biggest misconception is that people think we are gambling, because we play games that have dice and cards. Thankfully, we are slowly changing this idea, and the way that people think about games." This misconception has been quite the challenge to the community, as they have had difficulty in finding a public space to meet and play games. "The problem is that we could not use a venue for more than a week or two before getting kicked out, because people didn't understand." Eventually, the community reached out to Suika Art Café, who welcomed them, and offered a place for players to meet and play games. Today, Tabletop Games Oman has around 50 members and is still growing.

"This community will stay here for the rest of our lives, if not on to our children's lives. We have people from all around the world and when they go back home, they connect our community with the communities where they come from, and in this regard, it is becoming a sort of network around the world."

